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THE WHITE GLADIATOR.

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A Tale of a Border Banditta!

A MYSTERIOUS CHARACTER

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OR,

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BEADLE AND COMPANY, Publishers,

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THE

WHITE GLADIATOR;

OR,

MANOLA, THE SUN-CHILD.

A TALE OF THE LAST OF THE MONTEZUMAS.

BY FREDERICK WHITTAKER,
AUTHOR OF THE "MUSTANG HUNTERS," "BLACK WIZARD," ETC.

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THE WHITE GLADIATOR.

CHAPTER I.

THE TEOCALLI.

THE stars of midnight looked serenely down from their dark vault upon the sacred city of Cholula, in the summer of the year of our Lord 1519. Late as the hour was, the streets were filled with a dense crowd of people, all gathered together around the foot of the great teocalli,* in the center of the town, the abode of the War-god, Quetzalcoatl.

There were many other mound temples or teocallis in Cholula, and all were lighted up at the summits, but the great interest of the night appeared to be centered around the chief of all, for the War-god was famous throughout all the land of Mexico for his oracles.

On the summit of the great teocalli, a pyramid several hundred feet in height, stretched a platform, surrounded with massive walls, and containing the low stone temple of the War-god, in front of which the square altar was built, on which burned the sacred fire.

That fire, and the twinkling flames from the other teocallis, were the only lights in the town that night; but high above the valley that surrounded Cholula, and chief of all the mountains that looked down upon the sacred place, was the flaming summit of the volcano of Popocatepetl, casting a broad lurid glare of light over valley and city, making the streets as light as day.

A low buzz of expectation was heard from the crowd that

* Teocalli. As this word will be frequently employed in our tale it may be well to remark that the Mexican temples were called teocallis. They were all built at the summit of immense pyramidal mounds of earth, terraced into steps, each about a yard high. The pyramid of Cholula still remains, the loftiest ruin in Mexico, over three hundred feet in height. The temple is in ruins.

filled the streets and the great square at the foot of the teocalli. They seemed to be awaiting something with anxiety. Their eyes were all bent upon the temple at the summit of the mound, but no one dared to ascend the steps.

At last a dull thundering noise was heard from the top of the teocalli. It rose higher and higher, louder and louder. It reverberated through the mountain passes, echoed from rock to rock, like the thunder it resembled ; and burst out into a grand crash of sound, as the whole of the immense populace fell on their knees in the square, while a dead silence prevailed below.

At the same moment the sacrificial flame on the great altar, in front of the temple, burst out into a bright blaze. As it flashed up, the huge figure of the idol, grotesque and horrible in face, and yet covered with jewels, was seen to be seated on a square pedestal in front of the altar, with snakes twined around his monstrous limbs, and the spear and shield in his hands.

Before him were the dark figures of the priests, in long robes, with disheveled hair ; and standing at the head of the sacrificial stone, by the altar, was a graceful, youthful figure, crowned with plumes, who swung to and fro a censer.

“The Prince Guatemoczin !” whispered an old woman to her gossip, as they knelt side by side on the pavement below. “The god will surely answer *him*. He is so handsome.”

“Hush !” answered her kneeling neighbor, “the police will cut our tongues out, if they hear us talking now.”

And the two gossips kept silence, in awe of the messengers of the terrible Moctezuma, supposed to be everywhere.

On the summit of the teocalli, meanwhile, a strange scene was taking place. A young girl, graceful and beautiful as a fawn, was being led forward between two of the priests, to the sacrificial stone.

The stone, a great block of jasper, was raised into a hillock in the middle, so that when the victim was laid thereon, the breast and heart were thrown up, the back being arched inwards.

The priests led the girl forward, crowned with flowers, and half dressed in white, the graceful bust alone exposed. The whole band raised a low, monotonous chant, to the deep ac-

companiment of the huge war-drum that stood by the stone. The young prince, Guatemoczin himself, was beating it, his eyes fixed on the hideous countenance of the War-god.

He too joined in the imploring hymn :

HYMN.

“ God of slaughter ! God of battle !
 By the victim’s last death rattle—
 By the beating of her heart,
 From the bosom torn apart :
 By the blood we pour to thee,
 By the victim’s agony,
 By the leaping of the fire,
 By the flames that ne’er expire,
 By this spotless sacrifice,
 Virgin fair, beyond a price,
 God of battles, hear us then !
 Tell us, are these strangers men,
 Coming from the rising sun,
 Or thy brethren, gods like thee ?
 Answer, War-god, by the stone
 Which we sacrifice upon.
 Speak aloud, as thou dost see
 All thy victim’s agony ! ”

As the deep chant ended, the girl was carried forward, and the priests tried to throw her on the sacrificial stone, while the young prince ceased to beat the drum, and suddenly looked down.

Hitherto the victim had made no struggles. She had come forward to the altar with a quiet and resigned expression, as if she knew the uselessness of resistance. But the moment that her eyes met those of Prince Guatemoczin, she started back from the altar, with a sudden shriek of recognition, exclaiming :

“ You ! You ! Guatemoczin ! Not from *your* hand should death come to Manola ! Not from *you* ! ”

The young prince had been standing on the head of the sacrificial stone, beating the drum. In his left hand was the flint-knife with which he was appointed to sacrifice the very victim who now appealed to him. But, as soon as he heard the tones of her voice, and recognized the face of Manola, the solemn expression of his face gave way to one of intense anguish.

He leaped down from the altar to the ground, and cast one arm around the fair girl, waving back the priests with the knife, and crying in husky tones :

“ Not her ! For all the gods’ sakes, not her !”

The whole transaction only occupied an instant. The girl saw Guatemoczin and shrieked. He leaped down and the priests started back like a flash.

Then arose a savage murmur from the black-robed priests. Horrible-looking specters, with their long hair falling over their eyes, and matted together with the blood of human sacrifices, they raised their long arms and skinny fingers to clutch away the girl from Guatemoczin.

“ What mean you, prince ?” harshly growled the chief priest ; “ do you think the War-god is blind, and will be cheated of his offering ? Sacrifice the girl at once.”

“ Did we invite you to hold the knife when you are no priest, and do you flinch from the duty ?” asked another. “ See, the god is angry ! His eyes flame. Slay her quick, or dread the wrath of the War-god.”

And he pointed to the hideous idol. The eyes, which were formed of immense emeralds, were indeed flaming, and thin curls of smoke issued from either side of the enormous mouth. The aspect of the hideous idol was doubly hideous, under the secret tricks of the cunning priests. Guatemoczin was a prince and a warrior, brave as a lion in battle, and yet he trembled before the frightful image of the god, and his knees seemed ready to give way.

“ The god is angry,” growled the priest, “ slay her quickly, and he will be pleased again.”

“ Priest, I love her,” groaned the young prince ; “ she is my own betrothed. *Must* she die ? I knew not ‘twas her. *Must she die ?*”

“ She must,” said the priest. “ The gods are angry with us. Terrible strangers have landed on our coast and we can not tell whether they be gods or men. The War-god has demanded that Moctezuma’s heir shall give him the thing *nearest to his heart*, before he tells us what to do to these strangers. Behold that thing. Prince Guatemoczin, do your duty.”

“ Do your duty !” growled out all the priests together, in a deep, savage chorus ; and they commenced their low chant

once more, circling around the prince and the poor victim, like unclean spirits.

The young prince, tall, handsome and vigorous, able to have crushed any one of the squalid-looking wretches with one hand, yet stood cowering and trembling with Manola in his arms. She, bright and beautiful, clung to him imploringly, crying only :

“ Save me, Gautemoczin, if you love me !”

But the eyes of the prince were riveted on the idol, which grew more fiery in appearance every moment. The chant of the priests became louder, drowning the cries of the victim for mercy. Again the ominous death-drum began to beat, and the priests signed impatiently to the youth to slay the girl.

“ It must be so,” muttered he at last, overcome by his superstitious fears ; “ *I must slay her.*”

He swayed the slight form of the beautiful girl away from him, and bore her to the altar. She made no resistance now and the drum ceased to beat.

“ Gautemoczin,” said the pathetic voice, so sweet and well-remembered, as he raised it, “ you can save me if you love me.”

Gautemoczin trembled violently, but kept his eyes fixed on the idol’s face.

“ Strike,” said the high-priest, in a loud voice ; and again the trumpet sounded.

Nerved to a pitch of desperation, the Aztec prince struck down with the dagger, and then staggered back, covering his face with his hands, and dropping the weapon.

“ I have done it,” he groaned.

But the next moment a shout of surprise and anger from the priests made him open his eyes, and he fell on his knees with a sob of relief.

Manola, erect and unhurt, light and agile as an antelope, and only clad in the short skirt of pure white feather-work she wore as a victim, was just in the act of leaping from the sacrificial stone, to the ground, over the heads of the circle of priests.

The leap was such as only the desperation of the moment could have given her courage to make. The next moment she was speeding away across the vast platform, on the summit of the teocalli, swift as an antelope.

"Dolt! coward! bungler!" shouted the enraged priest, shaking his knife. "You never struck her! After the victim!"

And away went the long-robed priests in full chase of the victim, to the edge of the teocalli.

Guatemoczin remained on his knees, cowering before the hideous idol, which now was breathing flames from its enormous jaws. The haughty warrior was completely prostrated.

He saw the flying figure flit across the great paved platform to the further edge, where he knew that a precipice many feet deep existed.

He saw her stop and turn to run along the edge. Then the crowd of hideous black figures surrounded her, and the next thing he heard was a well-known shriek, as one of the dark figures caught at Manola, and both of them disappeared in one moment from his sight, over the precipice.

Guatemoczin covered his face with his hands and groaned aloud.

"Gone! And I let her die!"

CHAPTER II.

THE FUGITIVE.

THE crowd in the great square had been silent during the beating of the war-drum. When it ceased and they saw the prince leap down and clasp Manola, their tongues were loosened, and they began to chatter again.

"What is the matter?" said one to another. "Does the victim struggle? Who is she?"

"It is the princess Manola, poor creature!" said an old woman. "She was to have been married to the prince, and now he must kill her. The War-god is very cruel."

And a murmur of sympathy went through the crowd, for the princess Manola was well known to all. They watched the short struggle above, and when Guatemoczin struck downward with the erring dagger, and Manola rose and fled, a

half-murmur of relief went through them. But the figures on the summit of the teocalli were quickly hid, leaving only Guatemozin on his knees before the idol.

Instantly the crowd made a rush and surge around the foot of the mound, to see what became of the victim. They heard a faint shriek, and then a loud shout from the priests above. The people at the edge of the crowd could see two figures, one white, the other black, fall through the air down the precipice on one side of the teocalli, at least forty feet deep. The dark figure reached the ground first, and the white one was seen to rise and bound away down the remaining steps of the mound, disappearing in the sacred grove, which surrounded the priests' convent, at the foot of the teocalli.

They would have paused, in compassion, but there were those there to spur them on. A number of Indians, richly dressed and armed, elbowed their way to the front, and darted off on the fugitives' track, crying :

“ Seize the victim, in the name of the great Moctezuma !”

The great crowd streamed after, for these men were the officers of the emperor, dreaded far and near. They plunged into the sacred groves ; and the shout arose, all over the city :

“ SEIZE THE VICTIM !”

Meanwhile how fared it with that poor victim herself ?

When Manola felt the dagger pass by her and strike on the sacrificial stone, the first wild idea of escape flashed through her mind. Mere animal instinct it was which gave her strength for the great effort she had made, and when she found herself surrounded by the priests and clutched at the edge of the precipice, it was a mere blind revulsion of horror and abhorrence that caused her to wrench herself away with frantic strength from the unclean grasp of the chief priest.

In the effort, both of them fell over, and turning in the air, the heavy priest naturally came undermost, being crushed to death in the fall, while the slight-framed girl was almost unhurt, the shock being broken to her.

Still only actuated by the blind love of life, like the hunted hare, Manola leaped down the steps of the foot of the mound, and fled into the sacred grove, not knowing where she was going.

Light and agile, and remarkably swift of foot, she gained the friendly shelter before the shouting populace had entered it, and fled wildly on. She heard the terrible cry, "SEIZE THE VICTIM!" and it only lent fresh energy to her flight. Soon the sacred grove was past, and a broad canal confronted her, which separated the grove from the rest of the city.

Not a soul was in sight. All the people were gathered around the teocalli, which frowned behind her, and all were coming fast on her track.

With a desperate bound, the hunted girl sprung far into the canal, and swam swiftly to the further bank, which she reached and climbed just as the foremost pursuer came in sight, on the other side. A tremendous burst of yelling announced that she was seen, and as she darted on through the dark streets, she heard the splashes that told of the close pursuit.

Away went the slight girl through the dark narrow ways, till she came to a corner. Up the cross street she ran, past the foot of one of the numerous mound temples, and then around another, till the open country appeared before her. She was panting for breath and nearly exhausted, but her pursuers appeared to be thrown out, for she gained the shelter of a maize-field undetected, and threw herself down on the ground to rest.

She could hear the yelling crowd scattering from street to street in the vain search, while the deep booming of the war-drum from the teocalli echoed from hill to hill. The great fire before the War-god's altar still burned up fiercely, and the poor girl could see the figure of her own betrothed lover, standing before the hideous idol, with a crowd of priests.

Manola smiled bitterly to herself.

"Ah! Guatemoczin," she murmured; "you swore to love me, and you could not save me from the priests. Let Manola die, if the gods will, but her last breath shall curse the coward lover that would not stir a finger to save her."

She rose up from the ground, and plunged deeper into the plantations, having recovered her strength.

"I will flee to the strange *teules*,"* she said to herself. "They say that they come to overthrow our gods, and stop the human sacrifices. They may protect me, perhaps. If not, let them kill me. I had rather die than go back to the arms of Guatemoczin, now."

It was the first definite idea of escape which the poor girl had entertained. She had heard the dreadful rumors of the strange men, with white faces and long beards, who had landed on the coasts of Mexico some time before. She had heard how they had defeated the numerous armies of Tlascala with a mere handful of men, and how the great Moctezuma had sent ambassadors to beg their friendship. Moctezuma the great, before whom all the world trembled, was afraid of these strangers, be they men or *teules*. It was to inquire of the great War-god of the famous Oracle of Cholula that she herself had been told to ascend the teocalli alone, where the treacherous priests had seized her, all unaware, as a victim, to be immolated by her own lover, Guatemoczin.

"Never will I worship the gods of Anahuac again," she murmured, as she fled on. "The strange *teules* are come to set us free, and to them will I flee."

But even as she uttered the words, she heard the sound of blowing conch-shells, which announced that the Indians were signaling to each other. The sounds came in a long line behind, and she heard the thrashing of sticks in the maize plantations, that told her that they were sweeping the country behind her, as if for game.

Poor hunted Manola ran on, the cold night-air chilling her frame, only half clad as it was in the white skirt of feathers, her little feet bare, bruised and bleeding.

She plunged into a palm-grove, on the other side of which was a field of cotton, and finally saw before her the broad, white high road which she knew led from Tlascala, past Cholula, to the great city of Mexico. She turned to flee toward Tlascala; for toward Mexico only lay more perils.

But already she heard the conch-shells of her pursuers far

**Teules*. Mexican word for gods or demigods. The Mexicans imagined that the Spaniards were gods who darted lightning. Even after they found them to be human beings they still continued to call them *teules*, and the name clung to them to the end of the conquest. (See Bernal Diaz' Memoirs.) Pronounced tay-oo-les.

up the road in that direction. It was evident that they expected her to take that road, and were determined to cut her off.

"They shall have a chase first, then," muttered Manola, setting her white teeth, in hunted desperation; and she turned and headed for Mexico itself, keeping by the side of the road, in the shade of the trees which were planted all along it.

She had the satisfaction of hearing the sound of her pursuers grow more distant as they searched the thickets on the road to Tlascala, and she felt that she was secure from capture for one night at least.

How she would escape under the glaring light of day never puzzled her. Manola was young and vigorous, and trusted to luck. She was the daughter of a cacique, and queen in her own right over a tribe of mountaineers, not far off.

"If I can once pass their line, and get among my faithful subjects of Totonac," she thought, "they will defend me even against Moctezuma himself, till the *teules* come to our help."

She left the road to reach the mountains. She knew that near the foot of those mountains was another road, by which she might elude her pursuers, *if she could get there first*.

Poor Manola, a princess hunted to death, fled all alone through the dark night, only lighted by the livid flames of the volcano above!

CHAPTER III.

THE CHILD OF THE SUN.

IN a wild, rugged pass of the mountains that encircle the great plain of Mexico, a cavalier in full armor, mounted on a splendid dark-brown mare, drew rein, on the morning succeeding the night of Manola's flight from her butchers. The cavalier was accompanied by four or five Indian runners, in fantastic dresses of featherwork, who eagerly pointed out to him the great plain and lake below, in the midst of which stood the queenly city of Mexico, her white towers glowing in the morning sun, and reflected in the placid waters.

"Santiago defend me!" exclaimed the cavalier, in Spanish. "They have not lied to us. The city is all that they said it was. Praise to the Virgin, who has added another great realm to the dominions of our gracious emperor, Don Carlos!"

He remained gazing with great admiration on the city, which was only some thirty miles below, and yet looked as if it could have been ridden to in an hour, so clear was the air. At last he turned his gaze on the numerous towns below him, and especially on one beneath his feet, which lay at the entrance of a large valley.

"What city is that?" he inquired, pointing downward.

The Indians understood his gesture, if not his words, and eagerly answered in chorus:

"Cholula. Cholula."

"Good!" said the cavalier; "I have done what the General ordered; and 'tis time I returned to Tlascala. These rascals of Mexicans are not to be trusted."

He was just reining in his mare to depart, when his attention was attracted by a burst of shouts from the fields below. The cavalier looked down, and beheld a strange scene. A narrow road wound around the foot of the mountain, and bordering it were fields of cacao, maguey, and Indian corn, stretching as far as a broad highway that led past Cholula to Mexico.

Through the midst of the last field, which now lay fallow, a half-naked girl was running toward the mountains like an antelope, and behind her, evidently in chase, came a number of Indian warriors, brandishing lances and yelling in chorus.

The cavalier no sooner saw that sight than he dashed the long spurs into his mare and set off full speed down the hill-side, making for the narrow road.

"Back, ye heathen knaves! Touch but a hair of her head, and I'll spit ye like so many larks!"

In three minutes from the time the girl appeared, he was in the narrow road; and the gallant mare, with a splendid bound, burst through the low cactus hedge that bounded the field; just as the poor fugitive fell exhausted to the earth, and the foremost pursuer reached her.

"Fly, Bavieca!" cried the cavalier, as he again dashed in the spurs.

The obedient mare really seemed to fly toward the captive. Already the Indians had closed around her, and snatched up the girl from the ground, but without harming her. The poor creature struggled faintly as she was being carried away on the shoulders of two of the warriors, while others gathered to repel the cavalier, whose attitude was so menacing.

But into their midst he dashed like a thunderbolt, his long, sharp lance projecting eight feet before his charger, his bridle hand supporting the other under his right arm, the point aimed *straight at the Indians' faces!*

"Santiago for Alvarado! Yield, dogs!" shouted the clear voice, as the horseman dashed the warriors aside, as if they had been children. One fellow made a great blow at him as he passed, with a sort of long staff studded with blades of flint-like razors. But the brittle weapon was shivered as if it had been glass on the steel cuirass of the cavalier, and the next moment he had reached the bearers of the poor captured girl, as they held her aloft on their shoulders, running full speed.

With a dexterous wave of the lance, he scraped the point along the naked shoulders of both warriors, ripping open the flesh *without engaging the lance*, and causing them to drop their captive to the ground, while he dashed by. But the well-trained mare did not overshoot herself. Obedient to the powerful bit, she was on her haunches in two jumps more, and whirled about as if on a pivot, to renew the battle.

Again the cavalier dashed at the Indians, keeping the lance waving about to perplex them, and hinder them from seizing it. Whenever he struck it was *in the forehead*, the broad, keen lance-head splitting the skull open, and then glancing off.

The Indians did not stay long to endure the fight.

If they had not been in chase of a victim for Quetzalcoatl, they would never have dared to face the dreaded *teule* so long, mounted as he was on one of the mysterious creatures they feared so much. In a very few minutes they broke and fled, with yells of terror, and the cavalier threw his shield to his back, put his long lance in the stirrup-rest, and rode up to

the poor girl he had rescued, who still lay on the ground, half fainting with fatigue and terror.

The cavalier looked down, admiration and pity blended in his face. He saw a slight, delicate girl, with a form like the *Venus de Medicis*, revealed by her only garment, a short skirt of white feather-work, wet and bedraggled with dirt now. Her long, wavy hair, like fine black silk, fell down over her bare shoulders, so faintly tawny as to be almost as fair as his own. The eyes were closed, but the shape of the features was perfect, and a glimpse of pearly teeth was seen between the parted lips.

Manola—for it was she—opened her eyes at last, and then closed them again, for she thought she had beheld a vision.

“Damsel, awake!” said a deep voice above her.

The girl did not understand the language, but the voice seemed inexpressibly pleasant to her. Half conscious, she opened her big, dark eyes, raised herself on her elbow, and looked wonderingly up.

She had a vague, bewildered impression of a strange, beautifully-shaped animal, covered with bright trappings, and on it sat a tall, handsome young man, in clothes that seemed to shine all over, while his bright auburn hair, glistening like gold, fell down from under a helmet crowned with plumes, all over his shoulders, and he wore a heavy blonde mustache, that was now lifted by a remarkably sweet smile.

Poor Manola looked and looked, as if she would never have finished looking.

All her soul was in her eyes, wondering and adoring. She had never seen such a creation before, and her simple heart fell down then and there, and worshiped the bright stranger, though her body lay as if in a trance.

“Poor child!” said the cavalier, pityingly, surveying the unconscious beauty; “how could the villains find it in their hearts to hurt so lovely a creature? Rise up, sweet little maiden, and mount behind me. I will take you in safety to Tlascala.”

Manola caught the sound of the last name alone.

“Yes, yes—Tlascala!” she said, eagerly, and leaped up to her feet, apparently unhurt from her long chase. Then she fell back a step, threw back her long black hair, and stood

with both hands behind her head, in an attitude of unconscious grace, gazing earnestly up at the cavalier, at whom she never seemed to tire of looking. Before the Spaniard could prevent her, she had dropped on one knee, and kissed his mailed foot, as it hung in the stirrup, exclaiming in a tone of mingled gratitude, love and adoration :

“ TONATIOU ! TONATIOU ! ”*

The cavalier looked surprised.

“ By Santiago, pretty maiden,” he said, “ you must be a witch to know me. I am he whom the Indians call Tonatiou ; but the General and my comrades call me Don Pedro de Alvarado, when they use ceremony, and plain Alvarado at other times. And who are you, sweet maid ? How shall I call you ? ”

The girl looked up in his face wonderingly, but as if longing to understand his words. Alvarado smiled, and tapped his own breast, saying :

“ Alvarado. Tonatiou.”

Then he pointed inquiringly to her. Manola clapped her hands with a look of delight, saying, eagerly :

“ Manola. Manola. Tonatiou.”

“ Manola,” said the Spaniard, with his kind smile, “ come with me, then. Those villains will be after us, if we do not go quickly.”

And he signed to her to give him her hand. Manola obeyed with quick intelligence, placed her own tiny foot upon the broad *solleret* or shoe of steel which the cavalier wore, and vaulted up behind him, on the croup of the charger. Alvarado turned and rode away toward the mountain pass, where he could see his Indian attendants standing, watching in dumb reverence the prowess of the *teule*.

The handsome cavalier climbed the pass rapidly, his powerful mare recking nothing of her double burden. When he reached the top, he turned and surveyed the valley of Cholula, and pointed with a gay laugh to Manola’s pursuers. The baffled Mexicans were running off toward the upper part of the valley, and others were gathering to them from all sides.

“ Praise the Virgin for her good help ! ” said Alvarado,

* Tonatiou, or “ Child of the Sun,” was a name universally given by the Mexicans to Alvarado, on account of his personal beauty and bright hair. Pronounced Tó-na-tee-yoo. Accent on last syllable but one.

gayly. "If we had staid there much longer, we had been undone. I can fight a score of Indians, and think naught of it, but yonder are several hundred gathering— Well, Co-catzin, what is it ?"

One of his guides was pointing eagerly to the upper part of the valley, and pouring out a rapid flood of Aztec gutturals with gestures that seemed to impress on the cavalier the necessity of returning speedily.

Alvarado comprehended the general drift of the speech, though not all ; but he had already picked up several words of Aztec.

" Let us go, then, in God's name," he said. " The General bid me ride till I saw Mexico, and I have seen it. Now let us return. Quickly, say you ? Well, quickly be it. Run on."

He gave his gallant mare the rein, and the Indian runners dashed ahead, through narrow gorges and cañons in the mountains, still keeping in sight the flaming summit of the volcano to the right, whenever they emerged from between the passages of rock.

The light, swift-footed Indians kept even pace with the mare, among the rugged passes, for indeed Alvarado was often forced to ride slowly. But they arrived at last at the pass beyond which they expected to see Tlascala, and the Spaniard was turning to encourage his tired charge, when the sound of a sharp yell overhead was followed by a volley of arrows and stones from the rocks above them ; and a crowd of warriors rushed out into the pass, to bar their further progress.

At the head of the warriors was a tall figure, brandishing a tremendous broadsword,* studded with sharp flints, and Manola recognized him with a loud shriek of—

" GUATEMOCZIN !"

* The Mexican name of this national weapon was the *Maquahuitl*. It is fully described subsequently in this story.

CHAPTER VI.

THE RESCUE.

ALVARADO and his guides paused at the sudden irruption of foes. In an instant the pass was blocked by a threatening multitude, the plumes waving on their heads, while spears and two-handed broadswords bristled from the numerous throng.

The Indian guides proved themselves brave men here. There were only six of them, armed with the same flint-studded broadswords as their enemies ; but they ranged themselves in front of the cavalier, as if they had been an army. They were Tlascalans, the bitter foes of the Aztecs ; the most useful allies of Cortez.

The Mexicans, numerous as they were, paused before the imposing attitude of the mailed cavalier and his Indian allies, and neither party stirred for a few minutes, till a second volley of arrows came from the rocks above, several of which bounded off Alvarado's armor, and one grazed the neck of his mare.

But not one was aimed at Manola.

One of the Indian runners sunk groaning to the earth, shot through the body ; at the same moment, and as if the spell had been broken, the other five bounded down the pass, brandishing their broadswords, and shouting the war-cry of Tlascala ;

“ *Ala-la-lah ! Ala-la-lu !* ”

But before they could reach the foe, the Spanish cavalier was ahead of them.

With Manola clinging fast around his waist, and he himself sitting up in his deep saddle like a tower, Alvarado thundered into the midst of the dense crowd, with his lance couched, shouting his own war-cry :

“ St. Jago for Alvarado ! Down with the heathen ! ”

Wary and bold at the same moment, he kept his left hand firmly on the shaft of his spear, behind his right, and under

the armpit, to prevent its being seized by any of the enemy and wrenched from him. He aimed only at his enemy's faces, and went at full speed.

Through the crowd of warriors he dashed like a thunder-bolt, by mere impetus overthrowing them right and left. With the instinct of self-preservation, every one dodged that terrible lance-point, coming for their eyes, and again and again did the keen blade rip open a skull as it passed.

The tall form of Gautemoczin sprung forward like a tiger as the spear of Alvarado missed his head, and the prince dealt a tremendous blow with his two-handed broadsword at the Spaniard. The brittle flint blade was shattered like glass on the steel armor, but the thin splints on the cavalier's shoulder were dented in by the force of the blow, and one of them was opened by a ghastly cut, from which a stream of blood flowed down.

Manola uttered a shriek, Gautemoczin a shout of triumph.

"He bleeds!" shouted the prince. "He is no god, but a man. Down with him!"

He caught a fresh weapon from the hands of his nearest warriors, and the crowd surged upon Alvarado again. The whole pass was choked with men, for over a hundred feet, and the mere inert resistance of such a mass of bodies had brought the gallant mare to a stand, almost at the further edge of the crowd.

"*The War-god's victim! Seize the victim!*" rose the shout.

At that sound a great rush was made at the cavalier. With Gautemoczin at their head, the Aztecs pushed and struggled to get at Alvarado, wedged so tightly together by the press, that not a weapon could be used. But Bavieca, pressed upon and pricked by weapons all around, piercing through her leather armor in places, uttered an angry squeal and lashed out right and left, rearing, plunging, kicking and biting, like a fiend incarnate.

She cleared the space around her, even when hands were laid on Manola's feet and Alvarado's lance.

As the savage mare plunged forward with a bound, the lance was jerked from the Indian's hand, the cavalier holding it under his arm like a vice, and the next moment Alvarado was free from the crowd.

But Manola was not so fortunate.

Two burly warriors had seized her slender ankles, tearing her, shrieking, from the saddle, and Alvarado was gone from her!

In the same instant, four of the Tlascalan guides—the fifth was down—came struggling through the press, fighting like tigers, up to the imperiled girl. Then, cutting down her captors, one of the guides shouted as he turned to make a savage blow at his pursuers:

“The *teule* will save you. Fly!”

With the instinct of flight, the girl struggled up from among the feet of the combatants, just as Alvarado came thundering back to her rescue.

But the enemy were so close and numerous that there was no time for her to mount again behind the cavalier. Alvarado charged, and the poor Tlascalans hewed, in vain. The Mexicans pressed pell-mell down the pass with them, and the girl was compelled to flee once more, trusting to her speed.

“SEIZE THE VICTIM!” rose the fearful cry again.

Down the pass, crowded together, went Spaniard and Mexican and Tlascalan. The object of all was Manola.

One side would seize her, the others would protect her. So intent were all on the beautiful fugitive, that they forgot even to strike at each other, as they scurried down the pass, to the open plateau of Tlascala.

The horse was first there. Four legs beat two.

Alvarado threw down his lance for the first time in his life, from horseback.

As he passed the flying girl, he leaned from the saddle, with a dexterity learned of the Moors in Spain, caught the slight creature under the arms, and swung her up in front of his saddle with a shout of triumph, just as the foremost pursuer cast a javelin at him.

The weapon wounded his bridle arm, between two of the plates of steel that guarded it, and Alvarado flashed out his long Toledo rapier, and turned to bay.

Guatemoczin was foremost in the pursuit.

His face wore a strange expression of fury, desire, jealousy and anxiety commingled, as he bounded forward, brandishing the long broadsword.

"Give me my bride, false *teule*!" he hissed between his set teeth, striking at Alvarado.

The cavalier parried the blow, but his guard was beaten down by the heavy weapon, which yet glanced off his cuirass. Before Guatemoczin could repeat the blow, the keen rapier caught him in the face, knocking a tooth out, and splitting his cheek open with the point.

As he staggered back, another rush of warriors bore down on Bavieca, and again the mare began to plunge and paw with her fore feet among the crowd, while the cavalier struck right and left among them, still clasping the defenseless girl to his mailed breast.

It seemed a miracle that she was not yet hurt.

But the voice of Guatemoczin could be heard shouting:

"Harm her not! Kill the *teule*! Seize the victim alive! Fight on!"

Already she was nearly seized again. The last of the Tlascalans was slain defending her, and Alvarado seemed to be lost, when an interruption occurred, unexpected by either.

They were at the very mouth of the pass, and close to the plateau of Tlascala, which was studded with woods.

From a small patch of woods, close to them, suddenly issued a succession of red flashes, followed by the roar of a platoon of musketry.

The bullets told heavily, with a succession of sharp thuds, on the closely crowded masses of the Mexicans, and a yell of dismay announced that the surprise was effectual.

"Santiago for Alvarado!" shouted the cavalier, as he dug in the spurs, and raised his sword.

Bavieca gave a great leap, and the sword fell, with all the descending impetus of the horse, upon the head of the Aztec prince, just as a body of Spanish soldiers came rushing out to the charge, and the Mexicans fled.

The force of the blow beat down the prince's buckler, and felled him stunned to the ground, whence he was snatched up in haste by his warriors, who ran off up the pass in confusion.

Alvarado drew up his trembling mare, and fervently thanked Heaven for his deliverance. He was near exhausted.

The next moment, up came his comrades with a rush, a

party of some twenty men only, armed with sword, shield and morion of steel, but otherwise undefended, save by a stuffed jacket of cotton closely wadded.

The musketeers, about a dozen more, could be seen at the edge of the woods, reloading their clumsy pieces, so that less than forty men had scattered several hundred Indians.

At the head of the Spaniards was a tall, stout young officer, with red hair and beard, and a square, leonine face, who seemed to be of a silent disposition, for he only grasped the hand of Alvarado with a smile, without speaking.

"By the splendor of our lady, Sandoval," quoth the cavalier, "you came to us in the nick of time, to save this sweet maiden. All the Tlascalans are dead, but *she* is the captive of my sword and spear."

Sandoval looked gravely at the beautiful girl, who, now that the strife was over, seemed ready to faint, as she hung on the Spaniard's saddle-bow.

"You have done well," was all he said, in a deep, rough voice.

"She shall stay with us," said Alvarado. "Father Olmedo shall baptize her, and she shall be a Christian. But how came you to be here, Sandoval, just in the moment I needed you? The holy Virgin must have directed you."

"'Twas no such thing," interrupted a rough, rollicking voice close to them. "The holy Virgin never troubled her head about it, Señor Alvarado. 'Twas we soldiers that knew what a hot head belonged to our Alvarado; and we just teased the General to let us go after you, and bring you back. And Cortez, good soul, he never refuses a soldier's petition, if it means fight. But by all the saints, if I had known what luck you were going to have in the way of damsels, it's not Bernal Diaz del Castillo, corporal and lance sergeant of rondeliers, that would have staid in camp, without getting one to match such a pretty pigeon."

And the speaker laughed heartily.

CHAPTER V.

CORPORAL DAIZ.

ALVARADO looked vexed at the other's tone.

"Mind your own business, Corporal Diaz," he said, sharply. "This is no damsel for the like of thee. This is a princess, the daughter of Moctezuma himself, rescued from death by my arm."

"I cry you mercy," answered the bold corporal, with a grin. "I thought you had stolen her from some cottage. She looks as if the great Moctezuma had cut her short in the matter of clothes."

"Lend her thy cloak then, Diaz," said the deep voice of Sandoval.

"Ay, that will I," said the rough but kind-hearted soldier, instantly stripping from his shoulders a splendid mantle of featherwork, the spoil of some battle. "Here, señor capitan, wrap up the poor little girl in this. She'll shiver to death, else."

"Thanks, Diaz," said the cavalier, gratefully. "Thy heart's in the right place, after all."

And he wrapped the poor, shivering, half-naked girl in the warm, bright-hued mantle, that had once adorned the shoulders of a chief, while Diaz stood by, smiling paternally on the operation.

Corporal Bernal Diaz del Castillo was a splendid specimen of the bone and sinew of that handful of men who conquered an empire under Cortez. He was a tall, strong, broad-shouldered fellow, not yet thirty, with a rough, weatherbeaten face, and bristly black beard. He wore the padded cotton corset which was the only protection of Cortez' infantry, below which his ragged cloth hose or pantaloons, once scarlet, barely sufficed for decency, by being patched with cotton in fifty places. Rough shoes or moccasins of raw hide, with the hair outward, were secured to his feet with thongs, and the only respectable looking things about him were his weapons of steel.

Those were well kept indeed.

The close morion or steel cap on his head gleamed like a looking-glass; his bright straight sword was kept as sharp as a razor, and his *randell* or *randash* shone like a mirror.

This last article was a buckler of steel, round, and about a yard in diameter, thick enough to stop a musket bullet, and provided with two slits, one at the top, to peep through, one at the right lower corner, to thrust a sword through. The long narrow sword and the steel buckler and morion were the only arms of Corporal Diaz and most of his comrades, for there were only fifteen musketeers, as many crossbow-men, and sixteen horsemen in armor, in the whole force of which this was a detachment that was now advancing boldly to Mexico, under Cortez.

Corporal Diaz was a privileged character. He was one of the few men under Cortez who had already had much experience in Indian warfare, having served in the expeditions of Cordova and Grijalva, the first Spaniards to explore the Gulf of Mexico. Although only a corporal, he was allowed a license of speech to the officers of the little army, that few of them used even to one another. With the grave leonine Sandoval he was an especial favorite, which he repaid by perfectly adoring that officer.

Alvarado found his beautiful charge reviving with the grateful warmth of Diaz's cloak. It was only cold and exhaustion that had caused her to faint, for they were on the lofty plateaus of the cold belt of Mexico, and the air was keen and cutting. But, as she revived, she clung closer to the cavalier, and poured out a torrent of thanks and blessings, the harsh gutturals of the Aztec seeming to melt into liquids on her pretty lips.

She pointed to the pass above them, where the Aztecs were still gathered, as if hesitating to renew the attack.

Guatemoczin himself could be seen, trying to induce them to follow him, his head bound up, but he raging up and down like a lion.

Suddenly Manola threw off the cloak, leaped upon the saddle-bow of the Spaniard, standing there, only supported by her preserver's hand.

"Coward and traitor, Guatemoczin!" she called out to the

chief, waving her little hand tauntingly. "You left me to die without a blow, but Tonatiou has saved me. *Him do I love!*"

The Aztec chief uttered a shout of rage.

"Shoot! Shoot!" he cried to the archers around him. "Slay the War-god's victim! Let not the *teules* carry her away."

Alvarado understood the gesture, if not the words, and pulled the venturesome girl down, as a cloud of arrows came from the rocks above. She jumped to the ground, just as Corporal Diaz ran forward and covered her with his round buckler, against which a dozen arrows rattled. One of them even stuck in his padded cotton brigandine or corset, but the stout soldier regarded it not.

"Give them a volley, musketeers!" he bawled. "Drive the dogs from the rocks! Señor Alvarado, carry off your lady, in the name of Heaven. She's too venturesome to keep long at this rate."

Alvarado took her again on his saddle-bow, wrapped in the cloak, as Diaz tossed her up like a child.

"I dropped my lance in the pass, Diaz," he remarked, as he turned his horse's head. "Try if you can get it back for me."

"Ay, ay, gallop home!" grumbled the soldier, as the cavalier rode off with Manola. "You officers draw the prizes, and we poor soldiers get the trouble for our pains. Get your lance indeed! What made you drop it? It ought to lie there."

"I will go for it, if you fear," said Sandoval, quietly, one of the few times he had yet spoken.

As he spoke, he turned round, and was walking toward the pass, where the Mexicans still hovered, when Diaz ran past him.

"*My* business, señor capitan," he said, angrily. "Officers don't go of errands. Support me with the men if you will. That's all I ask."

And the fearless fellow was running nimbly up the rocks, all alone, in another minute.

Sandoval beckoned to the sword and buckler men.

"Follow me," he said, in his quiet, phlegmatic manner. "Musketeers, kill me those fellows on the rocks."

He was instantly obeyed.

The musketeers brought their clumsy pieces to the forked rests in front of them, and poured a deadly volley into the Mexicans above, while the buckler-men followed Sandoval in a close body, covered with their shields, to protect their daring comrade.

Around Corporal Diaz, meanwhile, fell a shower of stones and arrows, bounding off morion and buckler, as he ran crouchingly on, covering himself as he best could. His padded corset was pierced in several places, the arrows sticking in the thick cotton, while the stones bruised him severely. But, heedless of all, he dashed on to where the cavalier's lance lay on the ground, picked it up in triumph, and uttered a derisive shout to Guatemoczin.

The Mexicans did not wait for Sandoval's men. They turned and fled, just as the Spaniards surrounded Diaz; and Guatemoczin, broken-spirited and humbled, saw with his last backward glance the little body of soldiers, erect and defiant, in the pass, while Manola was borne across the plain to Tlascala, clasped in the arms of one of the hated strangers, her last words those of scorn and contempt for himself.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MASSACRE OF CHOLULA.

OUTSIDE of the city of Cholula, on the side toward Mexico, was a great forest, through which the broad highroad ran, straight as an arrow.

At dawn of day, some weeks after the above event, a stir was observable in the forest, and the twinkling lights of numerous little fires could be seen among the trees on each side of the road. There was a low buzz of voices, and dark figures moved about here and there, while heavy masses of armed men gathered together under the shelter of the trees. A little way on in the forest, a barricade had been erected across

the highway, made of heavy trunks of trees, behind which lay a dense crowd of warriors, bristling with pikes.

As the light strengthened, it could be seen that a whole army; and that of considerable strength, was gathered in the woods, divided into uniformed companies, and under strict discipline.

At the edge of the forest was gathered a small group of superior officers, clustered around the tall central figure of Prince Guatemoczin.

The *caçique* was looking eagerly toward Cholula, as if expecting something from thence, but the road to the white city was bare and empty at present. They could see the twinkling fires on the tops of the different *teocallis*, and, frowning over all, the snowy summit of the great volcano, crested with fire and smoke above the snow; but no human being was visible.

"Did you send in the runners, Quamotzin?" demanded the prince, abruptly. "One of them, at least, should have returned before this, with news."

"Dread lord, they went at midnight," answered the officer addressed. "They had full instructions to penetrate as far as they could, and to bring us news of what the *teules* were doing."

"And has no one seen any thing of Maxa, the old woman I sent in?" demanded Guatemoczin, impatiently. "She ought to have been back with news ere this."

"The runners had orders to bring her in at any hazard," said the officer. "Methinks, dread lord, some of them are coming now. The light will soon tell us."

Guatemoczin peered through the lessening gloom, and uttered a sigh of relief. Several figures could be seen, as the sun drew nearer the horizon, advancing rapidly toward him.

The prince could not wait for their approach.

"Let us run to meet them," he said. "We have no time to lose."

He ran swiftly forward over the highroad, and soon met the men he sought, three tall, lithe Indians, almost naked, whose vigorous forms attested their speed.

All were panting for breath, and could hardly answer when the prince impatiently questioned them.

"What news, men? What news? Have ye seen the princess?"

"We have, dread lord," said one of the runners, falling at his feet in reverence.

Guatemoczin uttered a low cry of delight.

"She was among them, then? She is found! She will soon be mine once more! How looked she? Quick, fellow! Tell me, how looked she? Was she sad, as a captive might be?"

"No, my lord," answered the runner, hesitatingly. "She seemed to be treated like a princess by the *teules*, and Tonatiou was by her side all the time."

Guatemoczin ground his teeth, savagely.

"He will not be long," he said; "I will devour his body myself and win her back. But the *teules*, what were they doing? Did they seem to suspect any thing?"

"The *teules* are to march to Mexico this very morning, dread lord," said the second runner. "They have demanded an escort of two thousand troops, to be in the great square at sunrise to-day."

"And what did the *caçique* of Cholula?" demanded the prince, eagerly. "Did he promise the troops?"

"He did, dread lord. The plan is changed, and we are the messengers to tell you. The escort will march in front, and permit the *teules* to leave the city, and come here. When they are fairly in the ambush the escort will turn upon the *teules*, and kill them all at once, while the armies of the great king surround them, and prevent their escape."

"Good!" said Guatemoczin, rubbing his hands. "The strangers have run into the trap with their eyes open. They shall learn henceforth not to steal Aztec princesses from their lords. Have any of ye seen Maxa, or the two priests?"

"I did, my lord," said the third runner. "They are all three in the midst of the *teules*, and we could not get speech with them."

Guatemoczin mused.

"What does that mean?" he muttered. "Can the strangers suspect any thing? What keeps them? They should be back."

No one presumed to suggest an answer, and the prince

looked grave. He turned his eyes on the city, not a mile off, as if he would interrogate its silent towers as to what had become of his messengers.

As he looked, the sun showed its flaming face over the mountains; and in a twinkling the whole valley was flooded with light, drowning the feeble flames of the teocallis with the broad glow of glory.

As if the sun had been the signal, at the same instant the deep boom of a cannon sounded from the city!

"It is the signal for the *teules* to march," said Guatemoczin, in a low voice, eying the teocalli of the War-god. Now let the men of Cholula do their duty, and the *teules* are ours!"

In another moment the hollow boom of a *second* cannon was heard, sullenly echoing among the passes of the mountains.

Guatemoczin started and listened, and the officers and chiefs with him looked uneasy.

"What can it be?" muttered the prince. "Have they attacked the quarters without orders?"

Boom! Boom!

The reports of *two more* guns close together, made the Aztecs look anxiously toward the city.

A little cloud of white smoke was rising from the great square, at the foot of the War-god's teocalli.

"They are fighting!" said Guatemoczin, in a deep voice. "They are fighting, and we are not there! Order out the men! We will attack the city! Quick, *caçiques*! They will do the work before we get there!"

He remained standing in the road, watching the city anxiously, while the *caçiques* silently ran back to their divisions. Guatemoczin strained his eyes and ears, devoured by the keenest anxiety.

Presently he heard a faint hum in the distance, which resolved itself into the almost inaudible din of a far-off conflict. He looked anxiously to the teocalli.

"What ails the cowards?" he muttered. "Why do they not come out and join in the battle? They could decide it now."

Just as he spoke came the *boom! boom! boom!* of a salvo

of artillery, and he saw the white wall at the summit of the teocalli struck in several places, knocking a great breach in it.

Then came the rattle of a volley of musketry, and a distant shout, and over all rose a shrill yell of terror and dismay.

The prince stood as if petrified in the road, and saw a dark column of men, with the glitter of steel all over it, climbing rapidly up the green sides of the teocalli to the great white wall above, while a crowd of defenders started out along the summit.

"At last!" he muttered. "Why am I not there? Will the troops never be ready? What are they about?"

He turned angrily round to look for his *caçiques*, and beheld the edge of the forest full of men, crowded together without a semblance of order, all gazing apprehensively toward the town.

"Get into your ranks! Forward, men!" shouted Guatemoczin, running toward them. "Where are these officers? Get your men ready to march. Our countrymen are fighting the *teules*, and we must help them!"

Gautemoczin stormed and raged to no purpose. His chiefs did not second him heartily. Even while he was leading one company forward, it broke and fled with a cry of dismay.

Gautemoczin looked to the town for the cause, and beheld the Spanish banner fluttering on the summit of the teocalli, while the stormers were casting down the bodies of the Indians over the walls.

Out of the city below, came streaming a mass of fugitives, at the sight of whom all semblance of order disappeared in the splendid-looking host of warriors behind him. Without striking a blow, seized by one of those mysterious panics that baffle comprehension, they broke and fled through the wood, and Gautemoczin was left alone in the road, a General without an army!

In a few minutes more the foremost of the fugitives came streaming by, and the prince seized one of them, and demanded wherefore he fled. The man recognized him, and fell at his feet, sobbing.

"Dread lord!" he said, "the strangers are indeed *teules*.

They know even our thoughts. They have found out the plot, and begun to massacre all our soldiers who were in the great square to escort them. They dart fire and thunder, and our strength is as water to resist them. The men of Tlascala are sacking the town, and we are all dead men. Fly, prince, and save yourself!"

CHAPTER VII.

MOCTEZUMA.

THE emperor Moctezuma sat in his council-chamber, surrounded by his nobles, who stood silently before the throne, barefooted, and with downcast eyes.

Moctezuma was also silent, buried in meditation.

Every now and then he raised his head, and glanced through the huge open doorway of the great hall, toward the distant mountains. The palace commanded a full view of the city below, the glittering lake, and the white towns that spangled the green shores, framed in the mountains, chief among which towered the strange, snow-circled volcano, where the smoke hung like a black plume above a silver crown.

The expression of the emperor's face was one of consuming anxiety. He seemed to be awaiting tidings of some sort.

"Macatzin," he said, suddenly, "how long is it since the messenger went?"

"About twelve hours ago, sun of the world," replied the gray-headed minister addressed, bowing almost to the earth.

"They should be back now—should they not?" demanded the monarch. "'Tis but a few hours' swift running from Cholula."

No one spoke in answer. It was difficult to know what to say. Moctezuma mused silently for some minutes, when he suddenly said :

"Go forth, Macatzin. Find the messengers, if they are returning, and get their news. Waste no time for ceremony, but come back quickly."

The old courtier backed from the presence, and as soon as he was outside, hurried off to the broad causeway that led to Cholula.

He had not far to go, for the palace was close to the water's edge, and the Cholula causeway the nearest. He had hardly got there, when he descried the object of his search, a royal courier, in his leopard-skin kilt, his only garment, flying across the causeway at the speed of a horse.

In the center of the causeway was a second courier, waiting, to whom the first threw a small packet, and halted, panting.

The second man started like a hare, and ran full speed to Macatzin, who arrested him with the words:

"In the name of the great Lord Moctezuma!"

Macatzin took the package, and hastily reentered the hall, where he fell on his knees before the emperor, and delivered his missive.

Many were the covert glances of anxiety cast at the emperor by the courtiers, as he unfolded the package, displaying a great piece of white cotton cloth, painted with numerous figures and strange hieroglyphics.

Moctezuma studied it intently, and his brow grew darker and darker as he looked.

The first picture represented Prince Guatemoczin, surrounded by warriors, marching toward the great teocalli of Cholula, with the figure of the hideous War-god above, appearing to beckon them on.

The second represented a number of men lying asleep, dressed in the armor of the Spaniards, while above them smiled a very beautiful image, that of the Madonna.

The third represented the Madonna, standing in a triumphant attitude, while the War-god's image lay broken to pieces at her feet.

The fourth was a spirited sketch, in which the storming of the teocalli was represented, while Guatemoczin's troops were in full flight. The Madonna appeared in the heavens here too, casting flames of fire at the flying Aztecs, but *Guatemoczin was nowhere to be seen in the picture.*

"The *teules* have beaten him," groaned the emperor, as he looked. "Their white goddess must have found out all about

our designs! What is to be done? They have conquered the Tlascalans, and now they will conquer us! How can we resist these men?"

A second messenger was announced, even before the monarch had finished examining the painted hieroglyphics that told the story of the massacre of Cholula.

The new-comer was a weird figure in long, black robes, with coarse hair, matted together with clotted blood, falling down over his eyes. He showed no respect whatever to the monarch, rather addressing him as an inferior than an equal, for he belonged to the priestly caste, more powerful even than kings.

"Awake, Moctezuma!" he cried, in a deep voice. "Too long has the sword of the Aztec slept. From the summit of the teocalli the War-god watches afar, and lo! the enemy approach."

Moctezuma started up, full of amazement and fear.

"In sight, say'st thou?" he demanded.

"In full sight," said the priest. "We have entreated the god to give us advice, and he has given it. The strangers must enter the city, and be received as friends. But once safe, see to it, Moctezuma, that they never go back alive; for if they do, the days of Moctezuma are numbered."

As he spoke, the dull boom of a distant gun came rolling over the lake, and the priest pointed.

The broad Cholula causeway, in sight from the palace door, was all a-glitter with flashing steel.

The Spaniards had come, and where was Guatemoczin?

CHAPTER VIII.

MANOLA AT HOME.

Loud shouts, the beating of drums, and the sounds of the shrill war-whistles of the warriors, announced that some important event was taking place in the capital of the territory of Totonac. The event was the welcome back of their lost

princess, Manola ; and the whole tribe had turned out to receive her.

Above them towered the snow-crowned volcano, on whose further side lay Cholula ; around them spread a mass of jagged peaks, intersected only by a few narrow passes ; and only one open space remained to the west, where the little valley terminated in an abrupt precipice, that overlooked the great basin of Mexico and the silver lake of Tezcuco.

The whole valley did not contain more than two square miles of surface, but every inch of that was cultivated with an assiduous care that made it bloom like a garden. In the midst of the valley, and nigh to the great precipice lay the town of Totonac, its white houses surrounded with a lofty wall of stone, the whole place a fortress.

And a fortress it had been for many long years, from whence its hardy mountaineers had defied the whole power of the great Moctezuma, who had been compelled at last to sue for peace, by betrothing his nephew and heir, Guatemoczin, to the daughter of Ocelotl, the last caçique of Totonac.

And now the whole population was out on the great green by the edge of the precipice, shouting out a welcome to their returned princess, who stood on a raised platform, by the side of her father, the great Ocelotl.

King Ocelotl was a warrior of Herculean proportions, in the prime of life, his short, black beard slightly streaked with gray, and bearing the only scepter the warlike kings of Totonac ever used, a lance.

By his side, the only white man in the crowd, stood stout Corporal Diaz del Castillo, dressed like a prince of the Aztecs, but still retaining his trusty weapons of Spanish steel.

Ocelotl's hand was on his shoulder, and he was speaking to his people, who came to silence at the wave of his lance, as if by magic.

"Warriors of Totonac," said the king, "our child has come back to us, escaped from the snare of the perfidious Aztecs ; and who has rescued her ? The strangers, those same strangers that Moctezuma assured us came to devour us. Our child was betrothed to a prince. We did not want to let her go from us. What fear had we for Moctezuma ? All the rest of the mountain tribes trembled, but Totonac laughed at the

great emperor. We were secure amid our passes, and we defied him. But when an Aztec's spear is broken, then is his tongue a better weapon. He craved peace from us, and promised us great things, and sent us presents of gold and jewels, to buy our daughter. He promised us all wealth, and that she should be well treated as a princess equal to his own family. Why not? We were in this valley ages before the valley of Anahuac ever saw an Aztec. We yielded. Our child was sent to Cholula to meet the prince. He greeted her with words of love, and she believed them. Our envoys came back to tell us of the terrible strangers, and beg our alliance for Moctezuma. Then what happened? Ere they were back here, the Aztecs seized our child and would have sacrificed her to their bloody War-god, but that she escaped in the night. And who saved her in the morning? A chief of the strangers, whom we have heard of even here—Tonatiuh, the Sun-child. He exterminated all her foes and ours, and now sends her back to us, safe and unharmed, and asks of us her hand in marriage. Behold his ambassador, who comes to ask it.*

And he indicated with a wave the corporal of ronduliers.

The populace shouted aloud, as crowds will do on the least provocation.

Ocelotl waved his spear, and again there was silence.

"Men of Totonac," he pursued; "which shall we call our friends? The Aztec or the stranger?"

"The strangers!" was the unanimous shout.

"The strange soldier comes from Malinche* to ask our help. Shall we give it to Malinche and the strangers?" demanded the king.

"Help Malinche! Help the strangers!" shouted the warriors.

Ocelotl waved his spear.

"It is well," he said. "Let Moctezuma sit in a palace, with a crouching crowd of slaves at his door. The kings of

* Malinche. The name universally given by all the Aztec tribes to Cortez. It signifies simply "Master" or "Captain of Marina." Doua Marina was the celebrated mistress of Cortez, who acted as his interpreter to the Indians, and was constantly everywhere with him. Hence the name arose. Marina was corrupted into Malina, as the letter R did not exist in the Mexican language.

Totonac do not fear to ask their people for advice. To-morrow we will march to Mexico to offer our services to Malinche and to wed our daughter to Tonatiou. To-day let us feast and rejoice, for our child is come back."

In a moment the crowd of warriors had broken up, and was dispersed all over the green, while the girls and women of the tribe came running out to mingle with the feasters, and enjoy the holiday.

Corporal Diaz was surrounded by pretty maidens, who inspected his person and weapons with great curiosity, and plied him with innumerable questions, which Manola interpreted to him, for the girl, during her sojourn with the Spaniards, had already acquired a great deal of their simple language.

Now the green was cleared and the national games of the Totonacs commenced, for the stranger's amusement, chief among which was the renowned Game of the Flyers.

A lofty pole stood in the midst of the green, sacred from time immemorial to the Flyers.

Wound around the top spirally and coming half way down the pole were four cords each of a different color, their ends carried out over a hoop about ten feet in diameter, and then dangling down near to the ground.

Four young warriors climbed up the lofty pole, holding the cords, by means of pegs in the side.

Arrived near the hoop at the top, each fastened the cord around his body, and sprung boldly out into the empty air, with a reckless boldness that astonished even Diaz. The cords, checking their fall, began to unwind above the hoop, and round and round swung the four figures, following each other in regular order, and circling higher and higher, as the cords became longer in the descent.

If one of the men touched the ground for an instant it was only to gain fresh impetus by a vigorous spring, and, as the cords lengthened, and the lofty pole rocked, it seemed as if the gymnasts were indeed birds soaring in the air without any effort.

"By Santiago!" said Diaz, heartily; "those fellows have less regard for their necks than I have! Suppose a rope were to break—"

The words were hardly out of his mouth when a great cry arose from the encircling crowd. Diaz started up in his place with a low exclamation of horror, as all four of the flyers suddenly let go of the ropes, and went flying over the heads of the populace, against four great mattresses held up to break their fall nearly fifty feet off. The descent was managed with such exquisite skill that not one was hurt, and the corporal joined heartily in the applause that greeted the feat.

The shouting was interrupted by a sound of far other character.

It was the war-whoop of the Aztecs !

CHAPTER IX.

THE CAPTURE.

OUT of the nearest pass, not a quarter of a mile from the green, came pouring a dense array of Mexican warriors, shouting their fierce war-cry, and already sling ing stones into the outskirts of the surprised Totonacs, who had thrown aside their arms in heaps, and were entirely unprepared for resistance.

The women and children, crowded in with the warriors, indeed, made resistance almost impossible.

The Mexicans were numerous, well armed, and well led, and came swiftly on, with tremendous energy, their cries paralyzing the Totonacs for a few moments.

The warrior-king was the first to assume his presence of mind.

“ To arms, warriors !” he shouted, dashing forward through the crowd. “ We have beat them before ! Fight bravely on !”

A rush was made to the heap of weapons, and the Totonac warriors flew at the foe like tigers. But even in numbers their opponents were far superior. The mountaineers hardly numbered ten thousand warriors at the best, and only their impregnable position had saved them for so many years. But

the pass once gained—how or by what means none yet knew—they were fighting at a disadvantage, hemmed in before a terrible precipice.

In five minutes the Mexicans were on them, and they were driven back, vainly struggling against the inevitable ruin that had so suddenly overtaken them.

Poor Manola stood upon the platform, alone with the Spanish corporal of rondeliers, watching the fight with varied emotions. Diaz had not stirred, save to draw his sword.

"The captain told me to guard you, my lady," he said, simply. "I'll do it while I have life."

And he stood before her, watching the battle which rolled on, slowly but resistlessly, and every moment approached nearer to the platform on which they stood.

The deep array of Mexicans came on like a great tide wave, and the Totonacs were beaten back in a confused crowd to the platform and the edge of the precipice. They were only half armed, for the Mexican rush had forced them back from the very weapons they had carelessly thrown into the common heap, and a wild cry of wrath and despair arose, as the rearmost in the crowd began to fall over the precipice.

But still Manola and Diaz stood on the platform, mute and immovable, awaiting the moment which should bring the assailants close to them.

And it came at last.

Manola uttered a low cry, as a tall chief, his features hidden beneath a hideous casque, made in imitation of a boar's head, pointed to her, and shouted in hollow tones :

"Seize the victim!"

"Guatemoczin!" murmured the girl, falling on her knees, pale with terror. "He has come for me. I am lost."

The tall chief sprung at the platform, followed by a crowd of warriors, only to stagger back, dismayed.

Stout Corporal Diaz, who had remained quiet till now, strode forward and discharged a blow at the Aztec's head, which beat down his guard, cut through the tough casque of wood and bone, and stretched the chief, bleeding, on the ground.

"Santiago for Spain!" shouted Diaz, his deep, powerful

voice, heard above the shrill yells of the Indians, as he cut right and left, with a vigor such as his boldest foe could not equal.

The stout corporal was like a lion among wolves, cutting and thrusting at every one who tried to mount the platform, and compelling the Aztecs to stand back in awe.

The wounded chief was borne back, and they could see it was not Guatemoczin.

Whoever he was, he continued to direct the fight, the blood running down his face.

And indeed, that fight was nearly over now.

The hapless Totonacs, hemmed in by superior numbers, were being driven over the precipice, more and more rapidly, as their lessened numbers were less able to withstand the dead weight of their assailants.

Manola uttered a shriek of despair, as she saw her father fall in the midst of the little band that still struggled, and the cry was echoed by a wail of anguish from the rest of the victims.

From henceforth the slaughter was unresisted. One by one the last remnants of the fated tribe were hurled from the rocks ; and Manola was left in the midst of her enemies, a princess without a subject !

But still the dauntless Spaniard kept his post on the platform, raging from side to side like a lion ; and the enemy, numerous as they were, bore back from his blows.

“ Santiago for Spain ! Come on, ye dogs !” shouted Diaz. “ We will show you how a Spaniard can protect his charge, and keep her from you all !”

A dense ring of warriors was now packed around the platform, and matters seemed altogether desperate for the two, when a hush suddenly fell on the multitude.

The hoarse bellowing of the chief’s war-horn gave them the signal to fall back, and the Aztecs obeyed it instantly. Diaz beheld the circle widen, and found himself at last able to breathe a moment, when the chief himself walked out into the open space, and commanded him to yield.

“ What says the dog ?” demanded Diaz of Manola. “ Does he think that I will yield to such as him ?”

“ Yield thee, brave *teule*,” said the chief again. “ Manola,

tell him that he has fought well, and shall have his life if he will yield. You know his language. Tell him."

"And what becomes of me?" demanded the girl. "If I die, let me die now; not be sacrificed to the gods I have renounced. Order your archers to shoot, base tool of Guatemoczin. We had best die where we are. Death is our doom. Let it come."

"Not to thee, Manola," answered the chief, earnestly. "Guatemoczin has satisfied the god with promises. Instead of thee, he has promised him all the strangers; and he has consented to take them instead."

"Then how can you promise him his life?" asked Manola. "Guatemoczin was wont to speak with a straight tongue. Since when has it forked?"

"He shall have his life," said the chief, "on one condition. He must teach us how to conquer the other *teules*. Tell him that, and that I am Quamotzin, the prince's trusted vassal."

"What says he?" interrupted Diaz, who wondered at the discussion, and suspected treachery.

Manola told him all.

She expected that he would have scorned it.

To her surprise the soldier answered:

"Be it so. I consent."

"And will you plot against Tonatiou?" demanded Manola, indignantly. "Is life so precious to you that you will lick the hand of your enemy like a beaten dog?"

Corporal Diaz gave her a peculiar look.

"In Spain," he said, "we have a proverb that says, 'A woman's tongue often leaves her head behind it.' I know my business. Tell him to swear upon his gods to keep his promise, and I will give up my arms."

"I will tell him," said the girl, scornfully. "But henceforth, never speak to me again. Tonatiou told you to guard me with your life. *You have it still.*"

"Ay, ay," said Diaz, philosophically to himself, as the angry girl turned his words into Aztec for the emissary of Guatemoczin. "I have it still, and I intend to keep it, my lady, till I get an opportunity to join my comrades. To cheat the devil and his worshipers is no sin, and we shall see if Castilian art is not as good as that of a savage prince."

Quamotzin readily swore upon his gods to keep his word.

"The stranger shall not be sacrificed by the priests," he said; "and if he will lead us to the death of the other strangers who now profane our Emperor's palace, he shall be made a great man in Mexico."

"Enough said," replied Diaz. "Let him take my weapons."

And making a virtue of necessity, the single soldier, who had kept an army at bay, threw down his weapons and composedly folded his arms.

The deceitful chief made a rapid signal to his men.

There was an instantaneous rush from all round to the platform, and Diaz and Manola were rudely seized by a hundred hands.

Then the Aztec threw off the mask he had worn to that moment, and addressed Manola:

"I have thee now!" he said, fiercely. "Guatemozin would have saved thee from the priests before. He led his own household to seize thee, and would have joined the strangers and defied Moctezuma. But Tonatiou has foiled him, and now he will have vengeance on him and thee alike. The *teules* are in our power at last. They are in Mexico, and they think they are safe, because they foiled us at Cholula. Let them beware. In ten days from this, the whole of them shall be sacrificed on the great teocalli, and thou shalt see Guatemozin eat the hearts of Tonatiou and Malinche before he punishes thee for thy treason. Take them away."

The two prisoners were blindfolded, bound hand and foot, carried off through the pass by which the Aztecs had entered, and the valley of Totonac was left desolate, peopled only with corpses.

CHAPTER X.

A WOMAN'S WIT.

AT nightfall the two prisoners were placed in an empty room in some great building, and left alone.

How they had come and where they were, neither knew. Manola had been placed in a sort of litter, and the light carefully kept from her, while Diaz had been equally well muffled in a great mantle of cotton, slung by the hands and feet to a pole like dead game and borne away at a rapid pace.

All day long they had been thus carried along as fast as six or eight bearers could run. Every quarter of an hour they could feel that they were transferred to a fresh set of bearers without stopping, who ran on, faster than ever. But what their route had been, both were entirely ignorant.

Poor Diaz was the worst off.

Secured as he was, the most of his weight depended on his hands and feet, only relieved by a broad band around the waist securing him to the pole; and when he was laid on the floor he was nearly insensible from pain and exhaustion.

There the two lay for some minutes before they were disturbed. Then some one entered and Diaz was released from the pole, his mummings taken off, and he found himself in a bare stone hall, dimly lighted by the expiring sunset, while several Indians were leaving the place, as he rose on his elbow and looked round with a groan.

He saw the litter of the princess Manola close to him where it had been set down, but the curtains were still drawn and not a sound proceeded from it.

Diaz stumbled slowly up to his feet, hardly able to stand, and stretched his stiffened limbs by hobbling up and down the fast darkening hall.

He did not go near the litter, but broke into muttered imprecations on his own folly in taking an Indian's word.

"Get thyself asses' ears, Señor Bernal Diaz del Castillo," said the angry soldier. "They befit thee better than thine

own. Thou mightst have died, sword in hand, at the very least, where thou wast, and now they'll slaughter thee, as men do sheep, without a chance to strike a blow."

As he stamped up and down, a thought appeared to strike him, for he muttered :

"After all, Diaz, a live ass can kick a dead lion. It might be worse for thee. If I had but my old sword and buckler now, I could keep yonder doorway yet, against a regiment of such weaklings as these Indians. Courage, Diaz ! While there's life there's hope, and thou'rt not dead yet."

As he continued to mutter, the daylight vanished entirely, and the hall was left in total darkness.

Diaz groped his way to the litter, and was about to open the curtains, when the grating of bolts was heard, and a light shone into the hall.

The Spaniard turned, and beheld a tall, splendidly dressed Indian chief, in the doorway, followed by several inferiors, bearing torches.

The chief was different from the one he had seen in the morning, and indeed appeared of higher rank, for the attendants were all barefooted and held up their torches, while their bodies were bent nearly to the ground in obeisance. Diaz had never seen such respect paid to any but Moctezuma himself, whom he had seen when Cortez made his entry into Mexico, a few weeks before. Where were his comrades now ? thought Diaz.

The Indian prince advanced to the Spaniard, and scanned his figure earnestly, and not without admiration. Tall as was the chief, Diaz towered half a head above him, and his lean, sturdy frame was like a machine of steel, compared to the soft, rounded limbs of the Aztec.

The latter spoke a few words to his attendants, who retired, bowing obsequiously, placing the torches they carried in rings projecting from the wall, which Diaz observed for the first time. Then the door was closed and they were left alone.

"Well, señor ? And what may be your worship's pleasure ?" asked Diaz, returning the stranger's gaze with interest.

The Aztec prince smiled, shook his head, and advanced

to the litter, whose curtains he withdrew. It was clear he did not understand Diaz.

Within the litter the Spaniard beheld his companion, Manola, bound hand and foot, and lying blindfolded on the couch. The chief started when he saw her. It was evident that something surprised him, and angered him also.

He turned to the door, and shouted out something in his harsh language, which brought the trembling slaves to the door in an instant.

Diaz could only distinguish the name "Quamotzin."

It was the General who had taken them.

In a moment one of the slaves ran out, while the rest approached the captive princess, and removed her bonds with the utmost reverence, the prince storming at them all the while.

Diaz was puzzled, and still more so when he saw the splendid looking prince kneel before Manola, as if suing for pardon. The girl at first seemed dazzled by the torches, but in a moment more she started back and exclaimed :

"Guatemoczin!"

Diaz uttered a low whistle.

"Soho! Master Diaz del Castillo," muttered he ; "your worship has found the lover's secret after all! 'Tis the prince she told us of, that would have slain her. He looks repentant enough now."

And indeed he did.

It was Manola who seemed the captor, he the captive. She regarded him haughtily and angrily ; he crouched at her feet in supplication, till a noise was heard at the door and Quamotzin entered.

Then the prince poured out a torrent of furious words at the General, pointing to Manola, and appearing to demand why he had bound her.

Quamotzin seemed to excuse himself, but the other would hear nothing. Angrily he waved him off, and uttered a brief command to his attendants, who seized Quamotzin, and bound him hand and foot in a moment, tying him to the same pole to which Diaz had been attached before.

The corporal grinned with satisfaction as his enemy was borne away by the slaves, and Guatemoczin and Manola were left alone. But, although he could not understand a

word of their conversation, it was easy to see that Manola was yielding to the earnest entreaties of the Aztec prince, not without much hesitation.

"Manola," said Guatemoczin, earnestly, "if you would but hear me I could satisfy you that I am not the wretch you think."

"And how would my lord convince me?" demanded Manola. "My father sent me to Cholula to meet you, when Moctezuma asked my hand in marriage. I went, determined to make you a good wife, and cement the peace between our nations. You met me, and swore you loved me."

"All the gods of Anahuac bear me witness that I did Manola," he answered, earnestly. "Never knew I what love was, till I saw Manola first."

"And did your love extend so short a way, that you were ready to sacrifice me to the War-god?" she asked.

"Hear me, Manola. I knew not what it was," he said. "I went to the teocalli to offer a sacrifice, never dreaming what it was. The emperor himself commanded me and I did not dare disobey. The terrible strangers were approaching, and the gods decreed that a sacrifice should be offered at Cholula, by which they would answer."

"The gods!" said Manola, scornfully. "Fool and blind! 'Twas but the priests, set on by Moctezuma himself. Acelotl and Totonac had defied his force so long that he had recourse to fraud to conquer them. They could not reach us with their spears, so they beguiled the king's daughter away that they might slay her, and Guatemoczin was the brave warrior selected for the deed."

"Manola, you wrong me," said the prince. "The gods are my witness, I lie not. I knew nothing of the sacrifice destined to fall by my hands. If the emperor did, then has he deceived me."

"He has, with his false gods," said Manola. "Bethink you that I have been among the *teules*, and learned who is the true God now. You and all your people are fooled by the cunning priests."

Guatemoczin's eyes glittered with anger, and he half rose from his suppliant posture.

"Say it not too loud," he answered. "Tonatiou is not

here now to help you, false one. You fled to him, and I am ready to forgive you. Do not anger me by referring to him."

"Who saved me then, if he did not?" asked Manola. "Where should I be, if he had not rescued me from your hands?"

"Safe in my palace," said the prince. "When the War-god shot flame of fire at me, truly, I trembled, and knew not what to do. But when the night wore on, I grew cooler, and determined to save you. Had it not been for that accursed *teule*, my men would have carried you through the mountains safe from the priest of Cholula to my own capital of Tezcoco, where I am a prince, and where you are now. I would have defied Moctezuma had I caught you, ay, even to inviting the *teules* to come and help. But now all is changed."

"How changed?" demanded Manola.

"They are my foes now," said Gautemoczin, savagely. They stole you from me, and your heart is gone. I will have revenge on them all, and especially on Tonatiou, the accursed robber."

"And what has he done?" she asked, with a sidelong glance at his face, that he did not notice in his excitement.

"He has stolen your heart," said the prince, "and the gods will not give it back to me till I have eaten his. Let him beware. His time is near come now—his and theirs."

"What are you going to do then?" asked Manola. "Is it not enough that I am left alone of all my tribe? Your men have slain my father and all my kindred, by treachery. Would you also slay the strangers?"

"I will—every one of them," said Guatemoczin. The omens tell me that I shall never get your heart back, *till I have theirs.*"

"You never will," she answered, solemnly.

"But I will," said he, angrily. "Before the sun has set three times, the *teules* will be in my power. The omens told us to let them enter the city. They are there now, but they will never depart thence alive."

"Be it so," said Manola, suddenly changing her manner to one of compliance. That man yonder is one of them, and he was no better than you. He left me to die. Punish them

if you will. I will not say you nay. After all, you are one of my race, and I did love you once. I may again, if you treat me well."

Gautemoczin leaped up, his face radiant.

"Say you so?" he said. "And will you forgive me for doubting for a moment, when I repented so swiftly?"

"I will," said Manola; "but on one condition only."

"And what is that?" he asked, eagerly.

"My people were all slain. *Punish their murderers!*"

"It can not be," he said, "that all are slain. I gave strict orders to Quamotzin to spare all who laid down their arms."

"A Totonac never yields," said Manola, proudly. "He fights to the death. How did your people gain the pass?"

Gautemoczin hesitated.

"Nay, tell me," she said, half sadly. "Fear no vengeance now, for I am the last Totonac."

"You are not," said the prince. "There is another left yet, the guard of the pass. He let us through without giving the alarm. I myself bribed him."

Manola looked steadily at the prince.

"I thought so," she said, slowly. "One traitor can slay a thousand warriors unawares. Send him to me."

"What would you do with him?" demanded Guatemoczin, puzzled.

"I would see this traitor," said she, bitterly, "that I may curse him with the curse of a king's daughter."

"On me fall the curse, then," said the prince. "I bribed him."

"'Twas your right," said Manola. "'Twas his to refuse the bribe. Send him to me, or I shall think Guatemoczin's tongue has two forks."

"I will," said he. "Manola, for thy love I will do anything."

"Go and slay Quamotzin, then," she said, "and send the traitor to his mistress."

"It shall be done," said Guatemoczin.

He bowed, and left Manola alone with Diaz.

"Well, my lady," said the Spaniard, grimly. "A while ago you were bitter on me for yielding. Who has yielded now?"

"Not I," said Manola, quickly. "You shall see in good time, that Manola is true to Tonatiou."

"And if you say trne," said Diaz, "you shall see also, that Bernal Diaz del Castillo knows which side of his bread holds the butter. If it were not folly now, I could ask you something; but perhaps you would deceive me."

Manola looked at him earnestly.

"Perhaps we have wronged each other," she said. "I thought that fear made you yield."

"You shall soon see," he reorted. "Perhaps you hope to see Tonatiou, as you call him, again."

"See him again!" said Manola, fervently. "Oh, my dear lord! shall I ever see him alive? Plots gather thick around his head. You know not all, Diaz. They will all be murdered ere long, and Moctezuma keeps a fair face to deceive them."

"Plots were thick at Cholula," said Diaz, gravely; "but we foiled them. Could we but get information to the General now, I should not fear."

"Leave that to me," she said, "and tell me your wish."

"It is this," said Diaz, simply; "I have neard that these Mexicans will let a man free, if he can vanquish six men. Is it so?"

"It is," said Manola. "The gladiator's sacrifice, they call it."

"You seem to have fooled this prince of yours," said Diaz. "Tell him you want to see a fight. Tell him, that if he will give me my sword, buckler and morion, I will fight twelve, if need be, two at a time. I don't understand their clumsy stone swords, but I'll take any two you please, with my own blade."

Manola was going to answer, when the door opened, and a single Indian was brought in, bound, and laid at her feet by his bearers, who retired without a word.

It was the traitor Totonac.

The man's face was working with abject fear, as he looked up, and met the blazing eyes of his princess.

"Coward and traitor!" said Manola, in a low voice. "Was all the tribe of Totonac to die in battle to save thy worthless life? Now shalt thou have thy reward—to be torn to pieces

slowly, till it shall take a year to slay thee fully. Who tempted thee?"

"Prince Guatemoczin," murmured the renegade.

"And what did he promise thee?"

"Life, liberty, wealth and a beautiful wife," said the prisoner.

"And see how he has kept his word," said Manola. "I hold him in the hollow of my hand, and he has sent thee to me, bound, to deal with as I will."

"Mercy, dread lady!" muttered the prisoner. "Indeed I can tell thee something worthy of life. King Ocelotl—"

"What of him, slave?"

"He lives," said the prisoner. "I stayed behind—"

"What for?" she asked, fiercely.

"To plunder," he answered, faintly. "He lives, and has escaped. I helped him to hide."

Manola looked at him steadily.

"What wilt thou do to atone for thy treason, and save thy life?" she finally asked.

"Any thing, dread princess," he answered, trembling.

"Wilt thou carry a letter secretly to Malinche?" she asked.

"Yes," said the prisoner, eagerly.

"Write to Malinche, Diaz," said Manola, quickly. "I have found a messenger for thee. Write quickly, ere they come."

"That will I," muttered Diaz, as he fumbled in his pockets, and produced a scrap of pencil, and a well-worn breviary, such as the pious soldier always carried. "The Virgin forgive me for sacrilege, but life and death are no joke to her ladyship; and she will excuse me."

He hastily scribbled a few lines on the fly leaf of the breviary, which he tore out and handed to Manola, just before Guatemoczin reentered.

"See, Guatemoczin," she said, showing him the paper; "I have done thee good service by mingling with the *teules*. I have learned to write their tongue, and have sent Malinche a letter, which will draw off part of his troops, and leave the rest an easy prey. Let this man atone for his crime by carrying it. They think I am their friend, and that will deceive them."

"Good!" said Guatemoczin, unsuspectingly. "He shall go."

"And as for this fellow," she continued, pointing to Diaz; "him will I be revenged on. Let him gain his liberty, if he can, in the gladiator's sacrifice. Give him his own weapons, and let him fight two warriors at a time. He's big enough to make good sport."

"It shall be done," said Guatemoczin, delighted. "And thou, my Manola, shalt see the sport. Blessings on thy head! I love thee more than ever! Now I know thee true."

"You shall know me better, before you have done with me," she answered. "Let the messenger be unbound."

A moment after, the pardoned traitor was gone with the momentous message, and Manola smiled on Guatemoczin.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MESSAGE.

DON PEDRO ALVARADO sat on his horse in the great square of the city of Mexico, at the gate of the Spanish quarters in the old palace of Ayacatl. Behind him were half a dozen horsemen, the pick of their little troop of cavaliers, and Cortez was talking to him.

Alvarado's face was set and anxious, and he appeared to be impatient to be off, even while he listened respectfully to his General's orders.

"Alvarado," said Cortez, "remember that on thee and our little band of horse, lie the lives of the rest. Thou goest against my better judgment perhaps, because I can refuse thee nothing. But be cautious."

"General, I will," said Alvarado, earnestly. "But how can I stay here, when tidings from *her* are lost, till I hear something? I will but ride out half-way on the Cholula causeway, and question the peasants if they have heard aught; and then I will return."

"I shall expect you in an hour," said Cortez. "Go!"

Alvarado bowed his plumed head, and shook his rein. Bavieca started at a rapid trot, and away went the little troop, clanking across the square, and down the broad street that led to the market-place.

At the cavalier's side rode the once captive Spaniard Aguilar, the interpreter to their forces before they met Marina.

Alvarado trotted down the broad street, of which one-half was occupied by a canal, in anxious silence, his eyes glancing from side to side, as if he would interrogate the very houses for news of the lost Manola.

Contrary to the usual custom, there were but few people in the streets; and they did not turn, as usual, to gape in wonder at the Spaniards, but passed on with averted faces.

"Would to God, I had kept her with me!" muttered Alvarado, as he checked his horse to walk across the bridge at the end of the street; "we could have sent messengers to her father, as well as herself; and now she is gone, perhaps forever."

"My lord," interrupted the voice of Aguilar, at this moment, "there is danger abroad."

"Why?" asked Alvarado, absently.

As he spoke, he brought Bavieca to a trot again, and rode over the empty market-place.

"To-day is market-day," said Aguilar, gravely. "There is no one in the market. Plots are brewing."

Alvarado halted abruptly, and looked around him.

The market-place was indeed empty.

"You may be right, Geronimo," he said, slowly. "But, plots or no plots, I ride to the Cholula causeway to-day. Follow me."

He set spurs to Bavieca as he spoke, and they galloped down a second broad street, entirely empty and silent, which echoed to the clatter of horse-shoes.

Not a soul appeared below, but there were many faces on the house-tops, which disappeared as they swept by.

At the end of the street was a second square, from which radiated two great causeways, far into the lake. The one led to Cholula, the other to Tezcoco.

Alvarado halted and looked at both. The Cholula cause-

way was entirely empty, while along that leading to Tezcoco were clustered a number of market-boats and canoes, and some of the market-men were trudging toward him under burdens of fruit and vegetables.

Without further hesitation he rode rapidly toward them, and was greeted with shouts of "Tonatiou!" and unintelligible praises of their goods, which they eagerly thrust upon him.

"Ask them have they seen or heard any thing of Diaz and the Princess Manola, Aguilar," said the cavalier. "If they have, I'll reward them well."

But the inquiry met with no response.

Alvarado was in despair at gaining no information, and his time was slipping by, when a half-naked Indian pushed his way through the crowd and thrust into the cavalier's hand a small piece of dirty paper.

Alvarado clutched it eagerly and found that it was written on, while the Indian poured out a broken flood of gutturals, clinging closely to his stirrup the while, as if for protection.

The lowering faces of the market-men sufficiently explained the cause of his fear, and Aguilar had to reassure him, while the Aztecs drew off to their boats, muttering threats against the messenger.

But Alvarado was too eagerly employed in deciphering the epistle, an almost illegible pencil scrawl, the paper soaked through with the sweat of the messenger's body.

He managed to make out:

"GENERAL—I am a prisoner . . . the princess. She is deceiving . . . They will attack you in your . . . Give them Chol . . . again. I do not know where we are. The messenger will tell you. We are Guatemoczin's prisoners. Act as you think best.

"BERNAL DÍAZ DEL CASTILLO,
"Corporal of Rondeliers."

Alvarado sat for some moments lost in reflection. Then he looked round. The market-men were out of ear-shot, but they had gathered in their canoes, and seemed to be picking up hidden weapons. The quick-witted cavalier took his resolution in a moment.

"Ask him where he came from, where the princess is, and how to get there?" he said, quickly, to Aguilar.

"The princess is at Tezcuco," said the man, in answer. "She is in prince Guatemoczin's palace, and this morning will be brought forth to the great square, to witness the sacrifice of the *teule*, who was with her when she was taken."

"How far is it?" demanded the cavalier.

"About five hours' journey," replied the man.

"We can do it in an hour," muttered Alvarado. "When and how is the Spaniard to be sacrificed?"

"On the great square at noon," said the Indian. "He is to fight twelve men, two at a time."

"Enough," said Alvarado.

He drew a pencil from the little pouch at his saddle-bow, and scribbled a few lines on the back of Diaz's letter.

"Take this to the General," he said, gruffly, handing it to the Indian. "We will see that you are not pursued. Hasten to Malinche!"

Aguilar hastily interpreted the words, and told the trembling messenger which way to run to escape pursuit. He and the horsemen spread out along the causeway, to overawe the boatmen, who seemed menacing, and watched the Totonac run across the market-place like an antelope.

Then Alvarado turned his horse's head, and rode off along the causeway toward Tezcuco, followed by only six men, bent on the audacious attempt to rescue Manola from the hands of a whole army.

And not a man flinched from following.

CHAPTER XII.

THE GLADIATORS.

THE market-place or great square of Tezcoco was crowded with people on one side, the other being left open, from the front of the palace of Prince Guatemoczin, to a strong rope stretched across the square, behind which the people were kept by a line of guards. From each side of the palace, which was surrounded by gardens, stretched a short, broad street, and into the right-hand street, not fifty yards from the corner of the square, ran a broad causeway from the city of Mexico about fifteen miles off.

The whole population of the city seemed to be crowded into the square, and the housetops were loaded with people looking down. The rest of the streets were entirely deserted, for every one crowded to see the great show.

There was to be a gladiatorial sacrifice of unusual interest in the square. It was not every day that a captive was found, bold and powerful enough to fight six men.

Even such a one would have drawn a crowd.

But to-day a greater than this was come.

A stranger, one of the mysterious white *teules* they had heard so much of, was to be offered to the gods by the gladiatorial sacrifice, and more than that, the assailants were to be doubled in number and attack in pairs.

The teocalli rose on one side of the square, and its steps and terraces were lined with men gazing down, while the dark-robed priests crowned the summit.

"Good sport to-day, neighbors," said a fat citizen, in the front rank. "They say the teule is a strong one."

"He'll need all his strength," answered the other. "The prince has chosen all the best warriors to kill him, and they are chiefs. They say Quamotzin, his favorite General, is to attack first."

"Ay, ay," said the fat citizen. "The prince is angry with

Quamotzin. The General did but obey orders in seizing the Totonac princess, but the prince treats her as if she had never fled from him to the *teules*. Well, all's grist that comes to our mill. We shall have a splendid sight."

"Here they come," muttered the other, as the palace gate flew open, and a crowd of courtiers made their way following the state litter, all glittering with the prince Guatemoczin, with Manola by his side.

Manola was covered with jewels, and attired as a princess. She looked radiantly beautiful, and Guatemoczin was delighted to see that she smiled upon him, as if all was forgiven.

The litter was set down and the pair descended, only to mount a gorgeous throne, canopied with feather-work, which was placed for them in the square.

Then Guatemoczin made a signal with his hand, and Quamotzin advanced, with eleven other chiefs, all armed with flint-studded broadswords and wooden shields and casques, their bodies protected with cuirasses of close thick feathers, capable of turning the edge of a sword, if struck at.

They prostrated themselves before Guatemoczin, who sternly ordered them to fight their best, and atone for their disobedience.

Quamotzin and the rest retired, and then a slave brought in the captured weapons of Corporal Diaz, which he laid at the prince's feet.

Guatemoczin looked at them carefully.

"The helmet and shield are good," he said. "But that light sword is no match for ours. They will beat it aside like a feather."

Manola smiled.

"You will see," she said. "The *teule* will give us good sport, never fear. Bring him out."

Guatemoczin gave a signal, and Corporal Diaz was led forth from the palace gate, and halted before the throne.

Diaz was stripped to the skin, save for a small cloth around the waist. His Herculean body, hairy and muscular, looked gigantic among the slighter Mexicans, although their strongest warriors had been selected for the battle. His face was full of hardy resolution, and he did not quail before the eyes of the immense multitude.

On the contrary, he drew himself up haughtily, looked round with scorn, and said :

"Gaze your fill, dogs. You'll see me again, but you'll never see these puny champions here, after I have once laid them out for you. Give me my weapons, and you shall see 'twixt a man and a maid can fight."

"*teule?*" demanded Guatemoczin of Manola.

"*teule?* 'tis a pity to slay a warrior like him ! What says the ?"

Manola told him, and the prince laughed.

"He's a bold fellow," he said. "I could almost wish he had chosen to fight one at a time. Now that thou art safe with me, I could even forgive him. Tell him the conditions of the battle."

Manola addressed Diaz in Spanish.

"Señor," she said, "do you know how this fight is to proceed ?"

"I suppose till one side yields," said Diaz, coolly. "It will not be me, lady fair."

"Not so," said Manola. "It is life or death a'one. If you yield, you will be slain at the altar of the teocalli. You have two choices, to fight six or twelve. If you will take the weapons of your enemies, you need only fight six men, one at a time. But if you persist in taking *your own* weapons, you will have to fight twelve, two at a time."

"Be it so," said Diaz. "I had rather fight two men with my own sword and rondell, than one with yonder brittle things like pieces of glass. Not but what they're sharp, I'll own."

"Try one and see," said Guatemoczin, when the answer was interpreted.

Quamotzin advanced at a signal, and tauntingly showed the strange weapon he bore to Diaz, with an exulting smile. It was composed of a staff some three feet long, on each side of which were inserted wedges of obsidian, or black flint, their edges forming one continuous blade on each side of the head of the staff, and running half-way down. Diaz poised it in his hand, and returned it, saying :

"Too clumsy."

Quamotzin plucked a hair from his head, and struck it over

the edge of the sword, dividing it as neatly as if it had been over a razor.

Diaz looked grave, but shook his head when Manola repeated Guatemoczin's recommendation to take one.

"I will fight as I have been wont to," he answered. "I know my sword, for I bought it in Toledo. Those things I know not."

Guatemoczin frowned.

"His blood on his own head," he said. "Give him his weapons and bring the stone."

Manola addressed Diaz.

"Señor," she said, "it is not too late yet. I can save your life, I think, if I beg hard for it. I pretend to be your enemy to deceive the prince, but he will do any thing for me."

"It is too late," said Diaz. "Tell me only one thing. If I conquer *all* my enemies, what is to be done to me?"

"You will go free," said Manola.

"Will they free you too?" he asked.

"Nay," she answered. "I must do that myself, as I have done before."

"Then the Virgin be my aid, lady," said Diaz, piously. "You have done me a favor which I will repay by bringing our men to rescue you, when I am free."

"You are not free yet," she answered, sadly. "There is a terrible battle before you yet."

"The Virgin and Santiago will help me," said Diaz. "Let us begin, and I will show you."

"The holy Virgin aid you," said Manola, and she sunk back in her seat.

Ten men now appeared, staggering under the weight of a great slab of stone, which they set down in the square. In the top, set in the center, was a great copper ring.

"Give the victim the weapons he trusts in," said Guatemoczin, solemnly. "The War-god will defend his own."

Diaz took up the steel morion, and fitted the chain under his chin with great satisfaction.

"Once more, old pot," he said, familiarly. "Keep in the brains and keep out the blows, as thou wert wont."

And, indeed, he had reason to be fond of the close, firm

cap, with its ridges of steel over the crown, defying any thing but a battle-ax.

He braced the heavy steel buckler to his left arm, picked up his sword, and threw down the scabbard.

“Again, good sword!” cried Diaz, bending the elastic blade against the ground. “Now let them come!”

The sword was perfectly straight, long and narrow, the hilt of the form just then beginning to come in fashion, known as the “basket hilt.”

Then two slaves advanced and led him to the slab, where his left foot was bound with leathern thongs to the copper ring, and he was left alone.

“Attack!” said the voice of Guatemoczin, and as he spoke the words, Quamotzin and a brother *caçique* rushed to the attack of the naked Spaniard, while the multitude set up a great shout.

Manola with difficulty refrained from uttering a shriek, as she saw the unequal contest, and watched it with intent and eager interest.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE COMBAT.

THE figure of Corporal Diaz, as he braced himself for the combat, was a study for an artist. He looked simply magnificent, with the great knotted muscles standing out in bold relief on his brawny limbs, as he towered half a head over the tallest of his foes.

He stood with his left foot well advanced, the knee bent, his buckler close to his breast, and the sword shortened in his right hand, ready to thrust.

Both the Aztec chiefs rushed forward together, holding their great broadswords in both hands, disdaining to cover themselves. Each was nearly as large as Diaz, and both struck together at his head.

Instead of drawing back from the blow, the stout corporal threw up his heavy buckler and met it fairly, dashing the

ponderous plate of steel into the face of one of his assailants, who staggered back as if a ball had struck him.

The sharp but brittle flint blades shivered on the rigid steel, and at the same moment Diaz stepped forward, with a great stride of his right foot, and made a desperate lunge at the face of Quamotzin.

The steel point caught the Aztec between the eyes, and entered the brain in a moment.

Quamotzin fell like a slaughtered bullock, and Diaz whipped out his point with a flash, only to drive it into the other man's throat the next moment, before the Aztec had recovered from the blow of the heavy rondell.

"So much for a good point!" said Diaz, with a defiant laugh, shaking his sword. "Long live sword and buckler! Bring on your next!"

In a moment more he was gratified.

The two next warriors obeyed the sharp order of the prince, who was mortified at the ease with which Diaz had overcome his two best warriors.

The two fresh foes came bounding on like the first pair, and rained a shower of blows on Diaz, who had again fallen back to his old position.

For a few moments it seemed likely to go hard with him, as he was attacked on right and left, and could hardly guard the blows. But his morion and rondell saved him from much danger on the left, and presently the keen point of the sword went flying forward and struck the other chief in the eye, blinding and staggering him back.

Then the corporal swung his right foot forward a second time, regardless of the blinded foe to the right, and dashed the heavy buckler forward on the other, to the left.

At the same instant, he thrust his point through the hole in the lower corner of the buckler, made expressly for it, and run the unhappy Aztec through the bowels, withdrawing the blade the instant he felt that he had done the work.

The chief fell back groaning to the earth, and even as he fell, the swift sword of the Spaniard, bloody from one victim, was sheathed in the other's heart.

Diaz was a terrible antagonist, quick as a flash, strong as a tiger, with the eye of a hawk. Manola began to breathe

freer as she saw three dead men, and one dying, lying at his feet, and he still unharmed.

The people had done shouting now. Early as it was in the contest, the interest had grown intense.

There were eight combatants left. Could the stranger kill them, too, or would he succumb at last?

The question was answered by Diaz himself.

The Spaniard shook his dripping blade, and shouted :

"The next! What! Will ye keep me all day waiting, dogs of Aztecs?"

They understood the gesture, if not the words; and two fresh chiefs advanced to the encounter.

But these did not rush so eagerly forward as the first four had done.

Warned by experience, they threw forward their round bucklers, light and strong at the same time, and advanced slowly and cautiously at *opposite sides*, to take the fettered victim in front and rear.

Diaz drew himself up, and awaited the attack, in a different position from his former one.

His feet were near together, the legs only slightly bent, and he kept close to the ring, resting himself as much as he could, and watching his foes keenly.

Slowly they advanced, one on the right, the other on the left.

Diaz waited until they were within distance, when he strode suddenly out to a distance of over six feet, and darted a thrust at the right-hand enemy's face.

The Aztec saw it coming, and threw up his buckler in time to catch it. The point of the sword stuck in the tough boar's-hide shield, and the chief seized the opportunity to strike at the naked Spaniard, with his heavy broadsword.

But Diaz was too wary to be caught by such a clumsy weapon. Before the blow reached him, he was back, thrusting his heavy shield out to meet the left-hand chief, who had rushed forward to strike at the same moment with his companion.

Again his superior physical strength prevailed, and he dashed the Aztec back by main force, receiving a heavy blow on

the steel morion without heeding it, and prostrating the chief on the ground.

Before Diaz could recover himself, the other warrior made a second blow, only partially broken by the guard the soldier instinctively made.

It missed his neck, at which it was aimed; but struck his right shoulder, grazing it with a sweeping cut, and opening a clean gash three inches long, from which the blood streamed down over his arm.

Diaz uttered a savage curse, and retorted with a slash of his sword, that laid open the other's face, and as the chief staggered back, the Spaniard stabbed him three times in the breast, with so quick a motion it was hardly perceptible.

Not waiting to see him fall, Diaz turned and thrust down at the other, before he could rise, and then waved his sword, crimson with the blood of six enemies, in triumph over his head.

"Come on!" he growled, angrily, shaking the weapon at the rest. "It's not a scratch will scare Cortez' robbers! Come on, I say!"

His right arm was crimson with blood, but the wound was a slight one, and only the razor-like sharpness of the Aztec sword had caused such a flow of blood. The cut was quite shallow.

The people had shouted to see the blood flow, but when the two next champions had fallen, in the very moment of their apparent success, a deep silence again reigned over the multitude.

Half of the assailants were slain. Would the rest fare any better?

Manola smiled slightly to herself, in spite of her anxiety, when she saw the terrified air of the next pair of warriors, who came forward to attack Diaz.

The two chiefs advanced on opposite sides like the last pair, but ready to start back at the slightest motion of the dangerous prisoner.

They had expected to kill a wolf, and a lion had shown his teeth to them!

Diaz pretended not to notice them, as they advanced, and

smiled to himself to see their terror. Presently he made a false start toward one of them, and both leaped back in terror.

The Spaniard laughed scornfully.

"Let me loose," he said, defiantly. "I'll fight the whole six of ye together if ye let me loose."

"What does he say?" demanded Guatemoczin.

Manola told him.

"Not so," said the prince, smiling. "He is a terrible fellow, this stranger, and he might kill them all."

"For shame, prince," said Manola, sneeringly. "Our Totonac warriors would have made short work of this stranger long before this. Your warriors are no better than women, if six can not kill this one naked stranger."

"Do you wish me to let him loose?" asked the prince. "You know that I will do any thing for you."

"I do," said she, answering the signal Diaz made with his eyes. "Let the whole six attack, and let him be set free. He has killed six now."

"Be it so," said Guatemoczin; and he gave orders to the slaves to set the captive free.

"Tell him to fight for his life," he continued to Manola. "And I will speak to my men."

Manola went forward to the liberated Spaniard, and told him how Guatemoczin had accepted his offer.

Diaz winked shrewdly.

"Be ready," he said, in a low tone. "Help is coming. I heard a sound I know well, just now—*the clank of armor*."

Manola could hardly restrain a start.

"When did you hear it?" she asked.

"Just now, when they were all so still. It was the sound of men-at-arms, at a trot. Thanks, lady, that will do."

She had covered the conversation by wiping the blood from his wound, and bandaging it with a piece of cotton.

"Come away, Manola," cried the prince, snappishly. "One would think you loved this *teule*, the way you nurse him. Let him fight out his battle now, if he can. Warriors of Tezcoco, upon him together, and cut the audacious stranger to pieces!"

As he spoke, Manola withdrew in haste, and the six remaining warriors marched forward, shoulder to shoulder, to attack one man.

Corporal Diaz, on his part, stepped boldly out, covered with his buckler, and marched straight at his foes.

When he came within ten feet, he halted ; and so did the six.

Diaz eyed them fiercely, bending forward slightly ; and then bounded forward like a tiger on the center of the line, with his heavy buckler in advance.

He bent his body almost double, and held his sword to guard the right side, while he struck the midmost Aztec with the broad rondell like a battering ram, and sent him hurling to the ground, stunned by the blow.

At the same moment, he dealt a slashing blow on the right hand, cutting two fingers from a warrior who tried to guard it, and the next moment had pierced the line, and was stabbing into the back of the first man on the right, whom he threw back on his next neighbor, mortally wounded.

So demoralized were the six by his previous successes, that they had not struck a blow, contenting themselves with clumsy efforts to guard.

But now that the line was pierced, the men on the left turned, and would have attacked him, but for one reason.

He was no longer there.

Like a flash, he had struck down one man, and stabbed another, and now he was fifty feet off, bounding like a cat, as if in full flight.

That reinspired them. They thought he fled.

The four remaining unwounded raised a yell, and dashed after him full speed, with uplifted broadswords. The people raised a great shout of triumph.

Diaz heard it, and turned.

Like a raging lion, his powerful figure flew through the air at his pursuers, who halted as suddenly as they had advanced, and gazed stupidly at him.

Right at the foremost he dashed, with a desperate lunge and extended buckler. The chief shrunk back from the blow, extending his buckler ; but the other dashed him back, as he

had the rest, by main force, and dealt him a mortal thrust, through that dangerous loophole below the shield.

Whipping out the sword in an instant, he rushed at the other three, who were huddled together.

Stung to desperation by the taunts of the multitude, whom Diaz had converted into friends by his marvelous defense, the last three of the chosen band rushed all together at the Spaniard, and attacked him together.

And indeed it was their only chance. Their weapons were only meant for attack. Defense was almost impossible with them, against the light, quickly-managed sword, in the hands of a trained athlete like Diaz.

They showered blow on blow at the naked Spaniard, and forced him to retreat, shifting his guard and stepping back, under the combined assaults of the three, who now tried to reach his undefended rear.

He was fast losing breath under his tremendous exertions, and a misstep might have been fatal to him even yet, when a sound that had been gradually growing plainer to the ear, in spite of the shouting, became unmistakable.

It was the clatter and clank of men-at-arms close by, coming at a gallop.

Diaz heard it, while the blows rattled on his steel buckler, and he suddenly broke away from his pursuers, shouting:

“Santiago for Cortez! Hurrah!”

At the same instant, a little troop of mailed horsemen, with leveled lances, galloped into the square from the Mexican causeway, and the three chiefs took to their heels with yells of terror, just as Alvarado swept past them, never heeding them, but making straight for the chair of Guatemoczin.

He knew that Diaz could take care of himself.

But before he could reach that chair, a brilliant figure, flashing with jewels, leaped from beside the astounded prince, ere he could understand it all, and flew across the plaza to the very feet of the galloping horses, shrieking:

“Tonatiou! Tonatiou! Thou hast come in time!”

In a moment the horses of the little troop were thrown on their haunches, under the powerful gag bits, and Alvarado shouted:

"Manola! Manola! Praise God and the Virgin this day! Mount quickly, or all is lost!"

The quick-witted girl obeyed without the loss of a moment.

Diaz had prepared her by his warning; and in an instant she had taken Alvarado's hand, and leaped up behind him, just as the populace recovered from their stupid amazement, and came surging over the ropes.

Guatemoczin, too, had sprung from his seat, and shouted frantically for the guards to follow; so that in a moment more a great wave of people was sweeping toward the rescuing party.

Most of the Aztecs were unarmed, but there were several hundred soldiers in front, and more came rushing out of the palace behind, to cut off the retreat of the Spaniards.

There was no time to lose.

"Hold fast, Manola!" cried the cavalier, as he wheeled round his gallant mare, and away they went across the square toward the causeway, at full speed, followed by the yelling crowd.

Diaz was already out of the square, and half-way up the next street. The astute corporal of rondeliers had taken time by the forelock, and put the utmost distance between himself and his pursuers, that he could, during the first confusion.

In a few minutes Alvarado's party passed him, running like a deer, his long legs taking immense strides.

As the horsemen passed Diaz, Aguilar slackened his pace, and the corporal threw up his heavy shield to the other. Aguilar caught it, and Diaz seized hold of the horseman's stirrup, running alongside as fast as the horse could go.

A hundred yards further, and the broad causeway to Mexico lay before them, cutting the shining lake!

But before they reached it, stones and arrows came flying down at them from the housetops, doing but little damage, on account of their rapid motion, but coming thick and fast.

The pursuers streamed after them at full speed, but the horses were fast leaving them, when they heard the war-drum sounding from the teocalli behind them, and saw the lake

covered with canoes, shooting from among the islands, to gain the causeway ahead of them.

They thundered on at full speed, leaving their pursuers further and further behind, but it soon became evident that before they reached Mexico they would be obliged to fight, for already men were landing on the causeway, several miles ahead.

Alvarado pulled up his mare to a slow trot, and calmly observed :

" Ride slower, gentlemen. If we must fight, we shall need all the breath in our horses. Walk !"

And the little party rode slowly on, breathing their foaming horses. Behind them and in front, at less than a mile in the former case, the causeway was filling with people, and it became evident that a perilous time was before them, if they hoped to reach Mexico alive.

They rode on at a foot-pace, the exhausted crowd in the rear toiling after them, and slowly gaining on them, the crowd on the causeway in front growing denser as they neared it. At last they were within three hundred yards of their foes, and Alvarado waved his lance.

" Hold fast to the stirrup, Diaz," he said. " Forward, gentlemen, in the name of the Holy Apostles ! Charge !"

A shower of arrows answered the challenge.

CHAPTER XIV,

THE SHADOW OF THE STORM.

CAPTAIN SANDOVAL was standing at the gate of the Spanish quarters, abstractedly looking down the empty street, and into the silent market-place in front. The captain was the chief of the guard that day, and had but just finished inspecting his sentries.

The day was intensely hot, and the silence of the city seemed to make it still more oppressive.

Sandoval was a man of few words, but the thoughtful look

of his face announced that his meditations were by no means idle. All the Spaniards were quiet in their quarters, except the guard, pacing their posts; and these latter had a serious, preoccupied air. The men on the walls of the palace inclosure kept glancing uneasily toward the city, and the silence of the streets, usually full of the bustling crowds, seemed to portend some brooding trouble.

Sandoval stood by the gate in the glaring sunlight, looking into the broad street and listening for some sound of life.

His heavy armor shot back the bright beams of the sun, till he seemed to blaze all over, but he heeded not the heat.

Presently he stalked out into the broad street, with a clank of steel on the pavement, and stood by the edge of the canal, looking up and down the street. Not a soul was to be seen.

He suddenly glanced up at the house-tops, and as he did so, beheld several heads peering over the low parapets of the flat roofs. The instant he raised his head, they disappeared.

"Humph!" was the only remark of the phlegmatic soldier. He was not given to useless words, but he felt that his suspicions were correct. Mischief was brewing.

Sandoval looked across the square into which the short street ran, and beheld the slight figure of a naked Indian come running swiftly across the plaza toward him. In a moment more he saw a number of people start up on the house-tops and begin to shoot at the fugitive.

The Indian kept in the middle of the square and ran on, but with the staggering gait of one almost exhausted.

In a few moments he had crossed the square, and came running up the street to Sandoval, streaming with blood from the grazes of arrows, though still not hurt seriously. He seemed to revive a little from his fatigue, as he halted, and reached out a folded scrap of dirty paper stained with blood, to Sandoval.

The captain took it, and hastily pointed to the gate of the quarters, motioning the Indian to run in. The archers on the house-tops had shot in perfect silence, and no alarm seemed to have been raised in the Spanish garrison as yet.

But the momentary pause proved fatal to Alvarado's messenger, for he it was.

Even as he started for the quarters, a last shaft, truer than

the rest, came whizzing from the same place whence Sandoval had been first shot at, and the false Totonac paid the penalty for the treason that had exterminated his tribe.

Sandoval left the body lying there, and walked deliberately back to the gate of the quarters.

As he neared the gate, he perceived the cause of their prudence. The great court-yard of the palace was full of soldiers, and the Tlascalans who accompanied Cortez were pouring out of their quarters at the other end of the inclosure, in perfect silence.

As Sandoval reentered the court-yard, the first person he saw was Cortez in full armor, his face grave and anxious.

"Captain," said Cortez, sternly, "this is not well done. You left your post without orders, and the people have attacked us. Tell me, señor, why should I not put you under arrest? What made you leave your post?"

"This," said Sandoval, laconically.

As he spoke, he handed the General the folded paper the Indian had lost his life in delivering.

The General's countenance changed when he saw the paper. He hastily opened it, and spelled out the puzzling missive of Diaz, on which Alvarado had indorsed these words:

"She is in Tezcoco. I go there now. When I come back arrest me for disobedience, but help me before I come.

"ALVARADO."

Cortez frowned deeply.

"On my conscience!" he muttered, (his only oath), "our discipline grows less every day. Now will this madcap run us all into a scrape, for the love of a savage maiden! Sandoval! Sandoval! are you all bound to precipitate our destruction, when our enemies are like a swarm of bees?"

Sandoval made no answer. He stood regarding his chief with an air of rigid, formal respect.

"I would not have had this happened for a million!" continued Cortez, in a vexed tone. "Until the fighting began we were safe, but now they have shot at a Spaniard, unpunished, something *must* be done, or we are all dead men. Speak, Sandoval. You talk so little, you should speak sense. What shall we do to rescue this madcap?"

Sandoval turned to his chief with a meaning look and

made the longest speech of his life, with a quotation tacked on it.

"When sheep grow bold," said the captain, "and butt at the wolves, there is always a ram to head the flock. There is a proverb which says, 'Never a flock without a leader. Kill the leader and the sheep scatter.' Let us heed the proverb." Cortez looked keenly at the phlegmatic captain.

"You follow the thoughts of my mind, Sandoval," he answered. "Speak out and tell me if I am right. What do you advise?"

"Seize Moctezuma," said Sandoval, briefly, "We owe him a visit. Let us pay it."

Cortez looked at the other fixedly for several moments, and then said: "I intended it. It shall be done. Come."

He turned away to the group of officers who had just gathered together near by, having got their men into order. The Spaniards had been so long in a state of momentary alarms, that they had slept on their arms for months, and now there stood the firm lines of rondeliers ready for action, the musketeers close by, with lighted matches, the horsemen, (what few were left,) in their saddles with poised lances, and the little field-pieces on the walls trained upon the street outside, the cannoneers ready by the breech, all in order, in two minutes from the first alarm.

Cortez and Sandoval joined the principal officers, and a short consultation ensued. In a few nervous words, the chief announced the determination he had come to, and asked the advice of his officers.

The proposition was agreed to, without a dissenting voice, and then was taken the resolution, by that handful of men to attempt the arrest of a powerful monarch in his own capital, when the embers of hatred in the populace were smoldering all round them; and only a spark or a breath seemed necessary to raise a flame of total destruction.

"In a mortal sickness use the knife," said Sandoval. "It can only help a coming death. It *may* cure the patient."

Not ten minutes afterward, a strong party of Spaniards issued from the gate, and marched straight to the palace of Moctezuma himself at the other end of the great square.

The streets were again still as death.

CHAPTER XVI.

A CHECKMATE.

THE Emperor Moctezuma was in the hall of audience, with a brilliant crowd of nobles around him. Before him were three chiefs, brilliantly dressed and armed, who had just come in from the field, apparently.

The midmost of the three bore in his hand a ghastly object, which he proudly exhibited to the monarch.

It was a human head!

Not the head of an Aztec, but that of a Spaniard, with long, tangled black hair and bushy beard, the face fierce and menacing, as if the owner had died fighting.

Moctezuma looked at it apprehensively, and averted his eyes, as the chief who bore it said :

“ Dread lord, you see the strangers are no gods. We have slain one of them, and find them men like ourselves. There were more slain, but their comrades carried them away, and their captain was wounded.”

“ Take it away,” said the emperor, waving his hand with averted eyes. “ Take it away and tell me how it happened.”

The chief, with a slightly mortified air, handed the ghastly trophy to an attendant.

“ How is soon told, dread lord,” he answered. “ These strangers, whom your majesty has received like brothers, left behind them on the coast certain people to build a town. The caçique of Zempoalla, as your majesty knows, rebelled against us, trusting to the strangers’ protection. I was sent to chastise them, and the strange governor, left there by Malinche, undertook to resist the armies of the Lord Moctezuma. We beat him back and slew the caçique of Zempoalla, according to orders. Yonder head belonged to a mighty man of valor among the strangers, who was taken prisoner, and died of his wounds.”

And the chief prostrated himself before the emperor to show that his story was ended.

Moctezuma was about to speak when a messenger entered in haste, and fell panting on the floor from exhaustion.

"The news, quick!" said the emperor, hastily, for he guessed that important tidings must be come, from the lack of ceremony observed.

The nearest nobles rushed at the messenger, and lifted him up, carrying him toward the king, when he panted out his message, word by word, as he found breath.

"I come from Cholula. Prince Guatemoczin sends word that he is not dead, as reported; that his army is formed again; that the Totonacs and Ocelotl are all killed; and that he has prisoners at Tezcoco, the Princess Manola, and one of the strangers who was with her, trying to seduce the Totonacs into alliance with Malinche."

"Good news!" cried Moctezuma, eagerly. "Good news for all! Where is our faithful Guatemoczin?"

"In Tezcoco, dread lord," answered the messenger.

"And why comest thou from Cholula?" asked the monarch.

"I came from there to deceive the strangers," said the man. "The prince heard that they had guards on the Tezcoco causeway, who might have stopped me. I left Cholula, therefore, while he went on to Tezcoco."

"But why did not the prince come here first?" asked the emperor, irritably. "He has neglected his duty. If he were here, we might strike the blow to-day."

The messenger was silent. He had no information on that point.

Moctezuma mused for awhile, and asked:

"Has the chief priest reported yet?"

"He has, dread lord," said the noble addressed. "The sacrifice is being offered now."

"And the caçiques of the four quarters, are they ready?" next demanded the emperor.

Four chiefs stepped forward, and one of them said:

"My people are all on the house-tops. They await the signal. When the war-drum sounds, they will fall on."

The other three chiefs signified the same thing.

"The ambush is ready," said Moctezuma, in a thoughtful

tone. "Will the victims enter it? We must await the omens. Let a messenger go to the great teocalli and await the sacrifices. Let him hasten back to tell us by the omens, whether the strangers shall be destroyed to-day."

A noble immediately left the room to obey the mandate, and a hush of expectation fell on the audience-chamber, only broken by the occasional chink of the emperor's heavy gold chains and other ornaments, as he shifted his position uneasily on the throne.

At last Moctezuma arose, unable to conceal his impatience, and walked to a window.

It commanded an extensive view of the city of Mexico. The great square, of which the palace occupied one side, lay below him. On the right was the vast inclosure which held forty temples, and in the midst of all the towering teocalli; on the left the city itself, with its mansions and hovels side by side, intersected with a network of canals; in front and on the opposite side, amid the best portion of the city, the towering walls of the Spanish quarters, in the palace of Aya-catl, the red and yellow flag of Spain fluttering on the summit.

The square was empty of any living creature, and not a figure could be seen in the streets; but many of the house-tops were commanded by the window, and every one was full of crouching people.

Moctezuma looked toward the great teocalli.

A little column of smoke slowly rose from its summit on the sultry air, only to spread out like a black pall over the temple of the War-god, in front of which it rose.

The emperor watched for a long time in silence, and then turned his eyes on the great square with an impatient sigh.

As he looked, he gave a violent start, his face paled, and an expression of deadly fear came over his face.

Moctezuma was a man of weak will, or he never would have allowed the Spaniards to enter Mexico as he did. He was superstitiously fearful of them, and resorted to secret plots, as readily as all timid creatures, hating and fearing others, naturally will.

Now, for the first time, he began to feel that the strangers were in his power, and his fears were giving place to a long

ing for vengeance on the men who had bearded him in the midst of his people.

And in the midst of his exultation and longing, something he saw in the square startled him, and set his heart beating against his ribs, like a hunted deer's.

And what saw he, to startle him so?

In the square, coming directly toward the palace were Cortez and eight other cavaliers, in complete armor, on horseback, but without lances.

Behind them marched ten musketeers and a score of crossbowmen, followed by a closely-serried platoon of rondeliers, their bucklers flaming like suns in the sultry glare.

They were coming so directly toward the palace that it was evident they meditated a visit to himself.

True, there was nothing strange in that, as Cortez had been in the habit of visiting Moctezuma. He had kept up the mask of courtesy, which the emperor had reciprocated, each party aware of the insincerity of the other.

Moctezuma trembled, nevertheless. His conscience made him fear that Cortez had discovered his plot, as at Cholula.

He turned around to his trusted adviser.

"Mocatzin," he said, faintly, "what shall we do? Malinche is coming. He has discovered the plot."

Macatzin was the only man who dared talk freely to the emperor, and the prime mover in the plot on hand. He hastened to reassure his master.

"It can not be, dread lord," he said, confidently. "We have trusted no one with the secret but ourselves. The strangers may suspect something, but they can do nothing against it. The instant the war-drum beats, they will be surrounded by thousands of foes."

"Then why are they coming hither?" demanded Moctezuma in a low voice, pointing at the steady little column, that came across the otherwise empty square.

"It is time for their visit," said Macatzin. "They may have come to find out what they can, but it will avail them nothing. Rather should we rejoice that they have divided their forces, and put themselves in our power. Without Malinche in their quarters, we can take them unawares. As for Malinche, he shall never leave this palace alive. When the war-

drum beats, the guards of Moctezuma are ready. The strangers have run into the tiger's den. Leave them to me, dread lord, and all will be well. Mount the throne, and receive them as if all were well. The sacrifices are nearly over now."

As he spoke, he pointed to the teocalli.

A procession of priests was seen, slowly pacing toward the War-god's temple, the signal that the oracle was about to be consulted. Moctezuma looked down into the square.

The Spanish cavaliers were just dismounting, with a great clatter and clash of armor.

As they did so, nine rondeliers started from the ranks in the rear, and each mounted one of the horses left free by the knights.

Moctezuma heard Cortez give some order, and the newly-mounted horsemen rode out as if on picket, facing outward toward the square, and watching for an attack.

"There *must* be some danger, Macatzin," said the emperor, in an uneasy tone.

"Let it come," said the minister, confidently. "I can meet it."

Moctezuma turned hurriedly away, for at that moment Cortez and his officers entered the palace below. The last thing that the emperor saw, was the musketeers throwing their rests forward, and leaning their heavy pieces on them. The crossbowmen, began to wind up their bows at the same time.

Every thing looked menacing below, and Moctezuma was still quaking inwardly on his throne, when the Spanish General entered, followed by his officers, and approached the emperor with a deep bow.

Behind the Spaniard, and surrounded by officers, was a young girl, as beautiful as Manola, and magnificently dressed in the pick and choice of the spoils of Cortez. Gold chains and bracelets decorated her bare neck and arms, and the luster of her great dark eyes outshone the jewels with which she was loaded.

This was the famous Doña Marina, mistress and interpreter to Cortez, who served him better, for love, against her country, than any man could have done for hire.

Of her the Spaniards proudly said: "The first woman that ever followed an army, and did it good service."

"Malinche is welcome," said Moctezuma. "He has paid us a visit in the heat of the day, which is not prudent."

The emperor spoke nervously, though he tried to conceal his tremors, under an appearance of courtesy.

"The heat and the cold are alike to the soldiers of *my* emperor," said Cortez, coldly, through Marina. "I come to see your majesty on business."

"Say on, Malinche," said the emperor, still more nervously. "What is the matter? Have not my people supplied provisions regularly? There has been some scarcity in the markets."

"For two days not a soul has been near our quarters," said Cortez. "The people have left the streets and hide in their houses. Not an hour ago, a messenger, coming to me, was shot dead in front of my quarters. Why is this?"

"It was done without orders, Malinche," said the emperor, (and he meant it, too, for the attack was to have been deferred till the general signal). "It was done without orders, indeed. I will have the men punished at once. Macatzin shall see it done."

"Good," said the Spaniard. "But that is not all. Yesterday I received a letter from my garrison at Vera Cruz, near your town of Zempoalla. Your soldiers have attacked my men, and slain two of them by your orders. Why is this?"

Moctezuma sat stupefied for an instant. He realized that the Spaniards must have corrupted some one, to have obtained so soon the intelligence he had but just heard himself. Weak and irresolute in danger, he hastened to disavow the deed.

"In truth, Malinche," he stammered, with great earnestness, "I never ordered it. I have but just heard the news myself, and have ordered the men who acted without my commands to be punished. Indeed I have. They shall be punished. You can not think that I would willingly hurt the subjects of my brother, the Emperor of Spain."

"I do *not* believe it," said Cortez, bowing low, but keeping his keen, dark eyes fixed on the emperor's countenance. "I do *not* believe it. I knew beforehand that your majesty would disavow the deed."

"The chiefs shall be punished—indeed they shall," said

Moctezuma, brightening up. "Macatzin shall at once see it done."

Moctezuma, before Cortez, was like a schoolboy before his master. The powerful mind of the daring Spanish leader subjugated him completely. Cortez smiled.

"They *shall* be punished," he said, slowly. "Your majesty will order them to be carried into the great square, before my quarters, and burned at the stake there. Am I right?"

"Yes, yes," said Moctezuma, hastily. "It shall be done, and the people shall bring you provisions at once. Macatzin, go quickly and order it to be done. Send for Quapoca, Coatl and Huitla, and order them to be brought here bound. And send the people to Malinche's quarters with provisions at once. Quickly!"

The astute Macatzin understood the monarch's meaning. Moctezuma, though nearly palsied with terror, wished to set the conspiracy in motion, unknown to Cortez. The Spaniards never stood in such danger as at the moment Macatzin turned to leave the hall. The place was full of Mexican nobles, guards lined the passages and stairs, and the hungry multitude outside only waited the signal to be let loose on the little handful of Spaniards.

Cortez knew nothing as yet with certainty; but he saw that it was not wise to let any one leave the room till he had settled his daring business.

"Guard the door, De Leon!" he muttered, hastily, to the nearest officer, a man of great personal strength and fierce looks.

Juan Velasquez de Leon faced about, and strode to the door with a clash, the slight Mexicans giving way before him like sheep. He drew his sword as he went, and struck the point, with a dull thud, into one door-jamb, leaning his back against the other, and looking stolid and fierce at the same time.

Macatzin, who had glided from his place to leave the room, recoiled before this grim-looking statue, and by signs appeared to beg for leave to pass out.

De Leon grimly pointed to Cortez.

"Malinche speaks," he growled, in Spanish, and thrust the timid civilian back, roughly.

Cortez was indeed speaking.

"Call back Macatzin," he said, in a clear, distinct tone. "I have business with him too, your majesty."

The emperor looked more alarmed than ever now, but he hastily said :

"Come back, Macatzin. Malinche would speak to you."

Then he sunk back on the throne, uneasily biting his nails, anger beginning to overcome the terror at his heart."

After all, Moctezuma was a monarch on his throne, and he felt angry at the open menace of De Leon's action. His suite and nobles began to cast lowering glances on the Spaniards, and a storm appeared inevitable. But, as the clouds gathered, Cortez only appeared to grow cooler and more resolute. A haughty, confident smile was on his face, thinly veiled by courtesy, as he said :

"Macatzin need not go forth, my lord. I know of a better way to settle matters."

"What is it?" demanded Moctezuma, eagerly. He thought he could deceive the Spaniards, after all.

"Your majesty," said Cortez, gravely, "I am well aware that the great Moctezuma is the friend of Malinche, and that by *his* will, none in this land would hurt a Spaniard. But as there are birds of all colors in a flock, so there are men of all characters in Moctezuma's dominions, and in my quarters. Great lord, my men are very angry, and I find it hard to restrain them. I fear, every moment, that they will break out, lay waste this city, and destroy every man, woman and child here. There is only one way for your majesty to convince them that you are our friend, and not our enemy. You must punish the Generals who have slain the comrades of my men. They are here in this palace, for my spies saw them enter, not an hour ago, with the head of a Spaniard."

"I have said that they shall be punished. Is not the word of Moctezuma good?" asked the emperor, sullenly.

"But besides that, there is *another thing*," pursued Cortez, with a snap of his fingers from the hand that hung by his side.

As if the snap had been a signal, the seven remaining officers stalked solemnly forward, and drew up around the throne of the emperor, with stolid faces, as if on duty.

They shouldered out of the way the few attendants who were near Moctezuma, as if they themselves alone had a right there; and at the same instant, seven swords flashed in the air, as the bearers drew them, and brought them to their shoulders.

Then they stood, stiff and solemn, around the throne, like statues on guard.

Moctezuma had half risen in terror at the first motion; but, when he saw the Spaniards made no further demonstration, he sunk slowly back, looking apprehensively at Cortez.

The Aztecs around recoiled with a low groan, as if amazed at the presumption of the strangers; and the hush that ensued was perfect.

In the midst of the hush Cortez calmly observed:

"There is another thing. We are your majesty's friends, and we expect you to show that you have perfect confidence in us. *We come to invite your majesty to take up your abode in our quarters, at once.* These gentlemen are all nobles of our land, and *have come to act as your escort.*"

For a few moments there was a dead silence.

Moctezuma looked at Cortez, the Spanish General returned the gaze with his glowing eyes fixed upon the emperor. His lips were sternly compressed, his face was perfectly unflinching, but his attitude was one of deep respect, as he stood with his head slightly bowed before the monarch.

Moctezuma listened intently, as Doña Marina slowly repeated the words of Cortez. Among the nobles, there was a subdued movement, as they understood the purport of the proposition. A sound as of many breaths drawn in between the teeth, but not a single word beside, was heard.

Moctezuma made no answer for some minutes.

His eyes fell before the hard, stern gaze of Cortez, and he uttered a low, fluttering sigh, while his heart seemed to sink within him. He stirred uneasily on his throne, his face worked as if he was suffering some torture, and his lips were drawn tightly. Twice he essayed to lift his eyes, and each time they fell before those of Cortez.

Then he turned to his people for consolation, and found his view intercepted.

Seven armed figures, with naked swords, stood grimly

round him, looking straight to the front, and he only caught a glimpse of his nobles here and there, between his solemn guards.

But presently he heard a low murmur of anger, and it reassured him somewhat. He plucked up courage and spoke.

"Why should I go to your quarters, Malinche? I am here in the palace of my fathers, and my people come to me daily for justice. I hear their causes and adjudge them. I transact all the business of my kingdom here. I can not leave it to please you. You ask too much. I have been too kind to you and your people, because I wished to show respect to my brother, the emperor of Spain. But I can not put myself to such inconvenience for you."

A deep sigh of relief went through the crowd of courtiers as they heard the refusal, and their faces brightened. Cortez smiled very slightly when he heard the murmur, and answered the monarch with the same iron resolution, veiled by courtesy, which he had shown throughout the interview.

"Your majesty's objections are weighty, but the exceeding love we bear you can remove the obstacles you mention. Your majesty shall be as free to transact the business of the kingdom in the palace of Ayacatl, as in this palace. Your household shall follow you, and be lodged there as well as here. The palace, though old, is in perfect repair, and far larger than this. It served your majesty's father in his lifetime. My men shall retire to the further corner of the inclosure, so that your majesty need not be annoyed by any of them. *Only your majesty will not need any guards.* The valor of the Spaniards will surround you as with a wall, and you will be safer with my men around you than in the midst of an army of your own guards. We will put you to no inconvenience, but we renew our invitation in our emperor's name. *Your majesty will be wise to accept it.*"

Moctezuma raised his hand to his brow and impatiently dashed away the drops of perspiration that stood there. He had a hunted, worried look, and his voice trembled, as he answered impatiently:

"I can not go, Malinche. I can not go. Indeed I can not. If I wished to go, my people would not let me. I should like to show you all courtesy, but my people would

not obey me, if I wished to go there. They would think I was constrained."

"Your majesty is in no wise constrained," said Cortez, grimly. "We do not desire to force you in any manner, but we renew our invitation to save your majesty from trouble. Our men are growing mutinous, since the news of their comrades' murder, and we dare not answer for the consequences to your city, if your majesty does not comply with our invitation. If you do, it will allay all their fears at once, and show that you have confidence in your friends and allies. Your majesty will be wise to come."

Moctezuma groaned. He felt the toils closing round him. He was shut out from his people's sympathy by only eight men, but every man seemed to be a giant to his apprehension.

He stammered out a fainter excuse.

"I wish I could oblige you, Malinche; but I dare not provoke my people. They would scorn me and desert me at once."

Here a rough voice, in Spanish, broke in on the dialogue. It was Velasquez de Leon who, single-handed, had so far awed the crowd around the door by his huge frame and fierce countenance. He was a hot-headed fellow, impatient of diplomacy, and well known among the soldiers for his harsh and brutal discipline.

He had not been able to hear all that passed, but he noticed a dispute going on; and, in his rough manner, undertook to cut the knot.

He left the door, and strode forward with a clash, his eyes flaming, his black beard bristling.

"Why do we waste words on the heathen dog?" he cried, harshly and fiercely. "Either he will go with us at once, or I'll run my sword through him!"

Cortez turned round imperiously, and pointed to the door.

"To your post, Señor de Leon. Who commands here, you or I? If a man leaves the room you answer for it."

"All right, General," grumbled the other, savagely. "But remember that we are but nine men."

He clattered angrily back, and seized a noble who was

trying to slip through the door, just in the nick of time. The savage cavalier threw the Aztec back like a child, and faced the crowd with such a hellish look on his face that the nobles shrunk back several steps, overawed by one man.

De Leon smiled sullenly and contemptuously, and squared his huge frame in the doorway.

But Moctezuma had been startled at the sudden explosion of wrath. He looked at his grim guards, and every one had altered his position. They were all glaring at him as savagely as De Leon, their heads turned on him, their bodies as stiff as ever.

The only soft eyes he met were those of Doña Marina, the interpretress.

"Tell me, my child," he said, trembling. "What is the matter? What did that fierce-looking man say?"

The girl lowered her voice, and mysteriously answered:

"I would not dare to tell your majesty. But if you will take my advice, you will go with them quickly and willingly. I fear for your majesty's life every minute you delay. And bethink you, that a sea of blood spilt to avenge your death will not give you one moment more of life. They will not hold their hands long. Malinche is your only friend, or they would have stabbed you ere this."

Moctezuma sunk back and covered his face for a moment. Oh! the unspeakable humiliation of that moment!

Then he rose up with a certain mournful dignity that never afterward left him. The inevitable he bore well. It was only in suspense that his nerve failed him.

"Malinche," he said, "I will go with you."

In a moment his guards fell back in a circle and executed a military salute. Cortez bowed profoundly.

"Your majesty has decided well," he answered. "We are your servants and soldiers henceforth. Your majesty will tell the people that you go of your own free will."

Moctezuma sighed deeply.

"I will do it," he answered.

CHAPTER XVII.

A KNIGHT'S HAZARD.

WHEN Alvarado and his little band found themselves beset by the immense crowds of the Aztecs, it seemed as if their position was nearly desperate. But the conquistadores were too much accustomed to bear down opposition, to be dismayed at any odds, however great. As Alvarado gave the word, they all charged together, the whole seven abreast.

Two of the horses bore double loads, the one carrying Manola *en croupe*, the other Diaz, the rondelier. The active corporal had leaped up behind Aguilar at the instant of the halt, and into the throng they charged.

The causeway was broad enough for twelve horsemen abreast, and so they had ample room. The impetus of their charge carried them through the center of the crowd, stones and arrows flying all round them.

But this only lasted for a few hundred yards. Then, all of a sudden, all their enemies cleared the causeway in front of them, and disclosed to view a more formidable obstacle than a foe.

This was one of the numerous gaps in the causeway, made for the passage of canoes, and usually bridged over.

The bridge was broken down!

As Alvarado and his companions noted the fact, they drew up simultaneously. The action was greeted with a yell of triumph from their swarming enemies, swimming about or in canoes, and again the arrows began to fly.

Alvarado heard the yell and shook his lance defiantly.

"Not yet, dogs!" he shouted. "We defy you, even here! Follow in file, gentlemen!"

And he trotted rapidly to the breach, rode down the steep side of the causeway into the lake, and struck boldly out for the opposite side of the gap, followed by his men.

The Mexicans waited until they were fairly in the water, and their horses were sunk into the deep mire at the bottom of the lake; when they attacked them at once.

A cloud of canoes came skimming up, from which poured a shower of arrows, and then the Aztecs closed.

The tables were turned now.

The very lances, so formidable at full speed, were powerless in the water. The horses, plunging through deep mud, and up to the necks in water, could only proceed at a slow pace, and a wild, irregular, unequal struggle soon began in the water.

Alvarado, who was foremost, escaped the best. Before the canoes could reach him, he had gained the other side of the gap, and Bavieca was scrambling desperately up it.

Arrows struck his back in several places ; but he had shifted Manola to his saddle-bow as they were in the water, and kept her from being wounded with his own body.

Bavieca reached the firm ground in safety, and stood panting and trembling there, while her master shouted out encouragement to his comrades in the water.

“Keep your lances and spur!” roared the knight. “The causeway is clear beyond us! The horses will bring you through! Well done, Diaz!”

The last exclamation was elicited by the sight of the terrible rondelier. Diaz had just performed a feat such as none but a man of his tremendous personal strength could have accomplished.

He was seated behind Aguilar, sword and shield in hand, and the overloaded charger could hardly struggle through the deep mire. The rest of their comrades had left them, and the two were exposed to the assaults of the Aztecs almost alone, the motto of all seeming to be, “The devil take the hindmost!”

Suddenly Diaz leaped up, standing on the horse’s croup, just as the bow of a canoe struck poor Aguilar, throwing him, half-stunned, on his saddle-bow.

As the canoe, which was full of warriors, stopped, the gigantic corporal leaped fairly on board, and hurled into the midst of the warriors like a lion.

The press was so close that not a blow could be given. There was no room to do any thing but stab.

And this Diaz did, with a strength and ferocity that *made no mistakes*. The heavy shield was an invulnerable defense,

and the strength of its bearer made it a weapon of itself. Diaz dashed aside the Aztecs as if they were children, and kept on, with short, quick stabs through the lunging hole of the shield, delivered like lightning.

In less time than it takes to describe it, he stabbed three men dead; and the rest leaped overboard with a howl of dismay.

The poor interpreter was by no means strong of frame, and would have been dragged off his horse in another moment, when Diaz lightened the animal so opportunely.

Relieved of two hundred and fifty pounds of flesh and steel, the gallant charger made a desperate effort, plunged and reared forward, and carried Aguilar to the further side of the gap, where by this time all the rest had arrived.

Three more had scrambled to the top, covered with wounds, in spite of their armor, their horses bleeding in several places.

When Aguilar reached them, the remaining two were still at the bottom of the ascent, and the Mexicans had got hold of them and were trying to drag them from their horses.

Poor Aguilar had dropped his lance and clung to the saddle-bow with frantic energy.

His horse happened to be one of the best in their troop, a large, powerful animal. Despite the helplessness of its master, the charger accomplished a victory, plunging in by main force between the contending parties and loosening their hold.

“Spur! Spur!” shouted Alvarado from above, and the three below mechanically obeyed the injunction.

Out of the water they scrambled, and toiled up the steep bank, the more easily because the Mexicans below were occupied with Diaz.

And the brave corporal of rondeliers was left alone in the canoe, which he defended against all comers, but which was drifting slowly but surely away into still thicker swarms of foes.

Alvarado stood on the bank above with his rescued band, and beheld the unequal contest with feelings of helplessness.

He could not get down to help his comrade, and his own safety was far from secure yet.

Reluctantly he turned his horse, and beheld the causeway to Mexico clear of foes, and the bridges still whole. There was no time to lose, for canoes were already shooting on to attack them still nearer the town.

Alvarado galloped off, and Diaz was left alone in the canoe surrounded by foes.

What his fate would have been, is easy to say. But just as he felt his strength failing him in the unequal conflict, and his heart had sunk within him, when Alvarado left him, he heard a well-known shout, a *Spanish* shout, from the lake close by him, and the clatter of horse-hoofs announcing that his captain was coming back.

"Courage, Diaz!" shouted the clear voice of Alvarado. "Help comes in time! Shoot, musketeers!"

The next moment the long black snout of a large canoe shot through the very gap that had given them so much trouble, coming from the other side, which had prevented its being hitherto noticed.

In the stern sat Sandoval, and between the Indian paddlers stood twelve musketeers, fully equipped with cuirass and morion, the smoking matches close to their musket-pans.

As the canoe glided out of the cut, it came to a halt, the paddlers backing water, and bringing the vessel broadside to the contest.

The musketeers leveled their pieces in the long rests, and took deliberate aim into the crowded canoes.

Diaz saw them, and dropped down into his own boat, just as a rattling volley, followed by the thud of bullets and yells of terror, announced that they had arrived.

The Aztecs waited for no more. It was their first experience of fire-arms. In two minutes from the delivery of the volley, Diaz, covered with blood from numerous but slight wounds, was thanking the phlegmatic Sandoval, with tears in his eyes, and in five more he was being paddled back to Mexico, Alvarado and his little band riding along the now deserted causeway.

"By Santiago! captain," quoth Diaz. "You came just in time. What has happened to scatter them so suddenly?"

"Two things," said Sandoval, laconically.

"What are they, captain? Did the Mexican emperor stop the assault?"

"He did," said Sandoval, dryly; "but no thanks to him"

"Why, captain?" asked the soldier, surprised at a certain twinkle in his officer's eyes; "where is he then?"

"In our quarters, a prisoner," said the Spanish captain.

Diaz looked stupefied, and said nothing for some minutes. Then he took off his helmet, and knelt down on his shield.

"Now praise to the Lord Jesu, and our Holy Madonna!" quoth Corporal Bernal Diaz del Castillo, devoutly.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE RIVALS.

WHEN Alvarado rode into the court-yard of Ayacatl, the Spanish quarters, he perceived that a change had taken place. Sandoval had told him the news of the morning, in his short, abrupt way: how angry Cortez had been at his rash expedition, and how he had crushed the culminating plot by the sudden seizure of Moctezuma, whose servants now filled the Spanish quarters; how the emperor had been compelled to send orders to stop the assault on Alvarado: and how he, Sandoval, had begged for a file of musketeers to enforce obedience.

"'Twas well you came along when you did," said Alvarado, warmly. "Those Mexicans did not seem to heed the emperor's orders, till they felt the lead enforcing them."

Sandoval smiled and said nothing. When they landed, he followed the horsemen in close order, the Tlascalan paddlers bringing up the rear. The streets were again full of people, and as they passed the market-place, they saw provisions in plenty. Moctezuma's orders had worked wonders in two hours.

But as soon as they entered the court-yard, they were convinced that the danger was indeed over. It was crowded

with Mexican nobles of the first rank, all unarmed, and attending to their various court duties, as if the emperor had always lived there.

The only sign of the Spaniards' presence was in the porter's lodge, where the rondeliers lounged on the seats, while two grim sentries guarded the gate, and closely inspected every Indian who passed in or out.

"Where is the General?" asked Sandoval of the officer of the guard, who approached them from the lodge.

"In the furthest court, captain," said the officer.

Then he turned to Alvarado with a constrained air.

"Señor Alvarado," he said, stiffly and awkwardly, "I am directed by the General to demand your sword. You are to retire to your quarters, under arrest."

Alvarado flushed scarlet to be thus addressed before Manola. For a moment it seemed that he was about to make a hot answer. But as he opened his lips, Sandoval pressed hard against his knee, and looking up, shook his head significantly.

Alvarado respected him greatly, and gave a proof of it now. He said nothing to the officer.

Dismounting, he took off his sword. Then he stalked haughtily across the yard, leaving Manola with Sandoval, much to her surprise.

The gruff, silent cavalier became suddenly courteous. He offered his hand to Manola, saying, with great politeness:

"The General sees all the prisoners, madam. Allow me to conduct you to him."

Manola only half understood him.

"What are they going to do to Tonatiou?" she asked, pitifully. "Has he escaped the sword, to be disgraced for fighting?"

Sandoval smiled.

"We Spaniards have strange ways," he said, evasively. "Let us go to the General. Tonatiou is safe enough."

Manola followed him with some hesitation, and Ordas said to Diaz:

"Follow him. The General wants you too, at once."

"What? Am I in arrest too?" demanded the stout corporal, with a grin. "Methinks this Cortez of ours is severe to-day."

Ordas laughed.

"No, no, Diaz," he said, kindly. "He only wants to see if you are alive."

"That I am, and in health too," answered Diaz, chuckling grimly, as he followed Sandoval.

As the Herculean figure of the corporal of rondeliers passed through the court-yard, the Aztec nobles suspended their various occupations, to gaze in awe upon him.

Meanwhile Sandoval conducted Manola through the outer court, where little fires, built on the pavement, were cooking the feast of Moctezuma and his nobles, the same as if at home. The glittering dress of the girl, and her evident nationality, brought many a lowering glance on her as she passed, but they went on unmolested, left the court, and traversed a long passage, opening into an inner court, much smaller than the other. This was full of their Tlascalan allies, looking elated and triumphant at the morning's stroke.

They crossed it, and entered the third and smallest court, where the surrounding buildings were very old and crumbling.

In front of a door at the end paced a sentry.

"The General's quarters," said Sandoval, and he entered, with Manola and Diaz.

Manola beheld Cortez, not for the first time. It was he who had sent her to her father from Cholula, to ingratiate himself with the mountain tribes, when impetuous Alvarado would have married her at once.

Cortez was pacing thoughtfully up and down the room still in full armor. Near him was a table, at which sat a gentle, quiet-looking priest, in the black gown of a Dominican monk. This was the celebrated Father Olmedo, chaplain to the invading army.

Standing in front of the priest was an Indian, whose half naked, sinewy frame, and leopard-skin kilt proclaimed him a messenger or runner.

Doña Marina, beautiful and richly dressed as ever, was questioning the man, while Father Olmedo wrote down his answers, as translated. Cortez turned abruptly and greeted Sandoval with a short nod. He glanced absently at Manola as if not noticing her, but started slightly at the sight of Diaz naked and bloody, who stalked into the room, saluted with his sword, and then drew himself up as if on guard.

The latter recognized Manola, and flew to embrace her, with words of love and surprise commingled. For the moment she had quite forgotten the messenger's news. Father Olmedo, too, rose and welcomed the lost sheep with great satisfaction. The good father recognized his most intelligent convert since Marina.

Cortez looked steadily at Diaz for some moments, and then a smile broke out over his face.

"You have been among thieves, Diaz," he remarked, dryly.

"That have I, General," returned the rondelier, grinning. "And they stole back all I ever stole from them, heaven save the mark! Faith! If it had not been for Captain Alvarado—God bless him—and for Captain Sandoval here, I know not but they might have been enjoying a feast over my heart and liver by this time, General."

"Give me thy hand, old comrade!" said Cortez, cordially. "Thou'rt worth a good fight to save thee.

"Go and wash off that blood," he added. "Thou look'st like a heathen dancing before his idol. Wash thee, and dress thee, and go to Alvarado. Tell him I want him."

The corporal wheeled round, and disappeared.

"Sandoval," Cortez asked, abruptly, "how soon can you start for Vera Cruz?"

Sandoval expressed no surprise at the question. He considered for a moment, and then said:

"Half an hour. What horse shall I take?"

"None," said Cortez hastily. "I can not spare one. You must go in a litter. The porters are ready along the road."

"Fifteen minutes, then," answered the laconic Spaniard.

"Good!" said Cortez. "Now listen. We have just escaped a great danger, and we are safe, for a while. Hardly was I in my quarters when I received this. Read it."

He handed Sandoval a letter, which the other perused twice, before he answered a word.

The letter was from the commandant of the little garrison that Cortez had left behind him at Vera Cruz. It ran:

"GENERAL:

"Praise to the Holy Virgin and our Lord Jesus, the garrison are in good health now. Since Senor de Escalante died of his wounds, I have been in command. A week ago our look-outs

discerned several ships in the offing. Since then they have landed their crews, and a number of soldiers. They compose an army of eleven hundred men, commanded by Don Paufilo de Narvaez, dispatched from Cuba by Governor Velasquez, *to take your honor prisoner, and carry you back to Havana, dead or alive.* Narvaez has already sent messengers to Moctezuma, accusing you of treason and all other crimes. Our garrison can hold these walls, if you will help us, but not without. Send us help quickly, or we must yield. *You are aware that Velasquez has many friends among my men.* Look to yourself, General.

JOSE DE RODAS."

Sandoval looked up and met the General's eye.

"What am I to do?" he asked, laconically.

"Take command of Vera Cruz," said Cortez, promptly, "and hold the garrison till I come. I will follow you in three days, with all the men I can spare. The rest I must leave with this hot-headed Alvarado. I see no other way. On my conscience, Sandoval, it seems as if all the devils had united to vex me to-day. You are the only soul that I can trust. Here is your commission to supersede De Rodas. Velasquez has sent a vain boaster to take me. I know this Narvaez. Before this, doubtless, the emperor has sent his approval of our actions. Therefore we must cut loose from the Governor of Cuba altogether, proclaim Narvaez a traitor, and *attack him.*"

Cortez looked inquiringly at the other. In truth, his position was terribly hazardous at this moment. Surrounded by treacherous enemies, his own countrymen had combined to destroy him, with far superior forces.

Many a man would have quailed under the blow, but, Cortez and Sandoval rose with the occasion.

"General," said Sandoval, gravely, "we are in a strait path. There is only one way out. We must take Narvaez' head, and make his men join us."

"Sandoval," said Cortez, warmly, "thou art my friend indeed. Go and act thy discretion. A word in thine ear. Alvarado is ours, too. If he were not, I should deal severely with him, for his rashness to-day. He nearly cost us seven horses, and they are worth a score of men. We must soothe him. Eh! Sandoval?"

"Easy enough," quoth Sandoval, dryly, and jerking his thumb toward Manola, who was eagerly relating her experiences to Father Olmedo and Doña Marina.

Cortez looked at the other with a strange smile, and then thrust him gently from the door with a low laugh.

"Sandoval," he said, in a low tone, "there's more in that red head of thine, than lies under the golden locks of fifty Alvarados. Heaven bless thee! Farewell!"

The grim captain chuckled, crossed the court in silence. He met Diaz returning, dressed in a new suit of Mexican finery, but still, as ever, bearing his faithful weapons. He had found a scabbard for his sword, and looked little the worse for his fights, save for the bandages on his legs and arms, to hide his numerous flesh wounds.

Alvarado was following him, sullenly enough. The proud-spirited cavalier was stung to the soul by his arrest.

Sandoval nodded as he passed, and then burst into a low chuckle, as he hurried to his quarters, to prepare for his journey. In the inner court, close to a postern door, was a litter, with eight bearers. Once they had been Moctezuma's porters. The fortunes of war made them Cortez' slaves.

CHAPTER XII.

ALVARADO'S SWEET PUNISHMENT.

ALVARADO entered Cortez' quarters, drew himself up haughtily, and saluted his General. Then he remained standing, looking steadily at the table.

Cortez was alone, except for Doña Marina. Father Olmedo and Manola were gone. Corporal Diaz had preceded Alvarado, and now drew aside, leaving the Spanish chiefs to confront each other. Alvarado would not look at his commander. His face was flushed with anger, and his lips were tightly compressed, but he said nothing. Cortez looked at his hot-headed lieutenant, with a faint, lurking smile the other did not see, or he might have broken out, for Alvarado was rash enough for any thing.

Then the General turned abruptly to the table, picked up the greasy and blood-stained missive which had provoked so much slaughter, and held it out.

"Alvarado," he said, in a quiet, conversational tone, "did you ever see this letter before? Who wrote it?"

"I did, General," said Corporal Diaz, gruffly.

Cortez turned round and measured the rondelier with his eyes.

"Who told thee to speak?" he demanded, in the tones with which he could awe any man in the command—except Diaz.

"Your worship asked a question. I answered it," said the corporal, simply and fearlessly.

Cortez turned away with the same lurking smile that frequently crossed his face. He liked Diaz for his boldness.

"Thou'rt wrong, Diaz," he said. "Some one else had a hand in it. Alvarado, *who indorsed this letter?*"

Alvarado flushed deeply. "I did," he muttered.

"In this indorsement," pursued Cortez, sarcastically, "you request me, very properly, too, to put your worship under arrest for disobedience when you come back, *if I please. I did please.* What have you to say against the justice of the act?"

Alvarado flushed deeper than ever.

"Nothing," he grumbled. "Only—'twas not kind. The captain-general, I thought, was my friend."

Cortez spoke sternly in answer.

"Señor Alvarado, you speak like a child. The captain-general has *no friends on duty*. Alvarado knows Cortez. There the matter ends. You asked me to arrest you, but to help you first. Where would you have been if I had not granted the prayer? I have done all you wished, and now you stand there like a sullen school-boy, when you should acknowledge a disobedience, and crave pardon for the offense."

"What could I do, General?" asked Alvarado, in a tone of injury. "Corporal Diaz was in danger of death, and there was no time to lose if we wished to rescue him."

"And who else was in danger?" asked Cortez. "Was one man, however good, enough to justify the loss of seven horses, when we have but sixteen, all told, each worth a million to us now? What right had you to suppose you could only rescue him, with only seven men?"

"I did it," said Alvarado shortly.

"And some one else too, Alvarado. But at the cost of many wounds, and much danger to us all. Had you come back, I would have sent enough men to escape all that danger, and do the same work. As it was, your rashness imperiled us all. For a woman's love you have risked the lives of five hundred men, and I will see to it that you do not do it again. Corporal Diaz, thou'rt a man of experience in the sex. What cures a man of too much love?"

"Marriage," said the corporal, stiffly.

Cortez laughed aloud.

"Right, old comrade! Thou hast found a cure to tame a hot-head. Father Olmedo, bring forth the bride."

The good priest made his appearance from a room in the rear, leading by the hand the blushing Manola. Alvarado started, and his face brightened considerably. Diaz grinned. Cortez alone retained his gravity. He addressed Alvarado with much solemnity, his humorous manner entirely gone.

"Señor Alvarado," said the General, slowly, "I am making an experiment with you. By rights, you deserve punishment. I am going to reward you. Tell me, Pedro, if I were in grave peril of death, what would you give to save me?"

Alvarado turned with a glowing face. His voice choked as he answered:

"My life, Cortez. You know I would. I have done wrong, but I do love her so."

Cortez extended his hand, and the impetuous cavalier grasped it warmly.

"I think thou wouldst give me thy life, Pedro," the General answered. "Well, then, listen. Velasquez has sent eleven hundred men to take us prisoners, and to bring my head to Cuba."

Alvarado flushed deeply.

"Let us march against them!" he cried, impetuously. "Does the greedy cur think we bought our treasures with blood to give to *him*? Let me march at once!"

"I intend to do that myself," said Cortez, slowly. "For thee, my Pedro, I have other work, even more important. We have gained too much, to-day, to be abandoned hastily. Pedro de Alvarado, to your hands I must commit the safety of our conquests here, while I am gone. Can I trust you?"

The men love you, but you are rash. I give you a bride to steady you. Will you be prudent?"

"Indeed, I will try, General," said Alvarado, warmly. "I will keep it safe till you return. But you, General, what will you do? If we divide our forces, how can you overcome eleven hundred men?"

"Leave that to me," said Cortez. "Father Olmedo, make these twain one flesh."

Then father Olmedo advanced, and joined the hands of the two lovers; and, amidst a solemn silence, the ceremony was performed which joined the Spanish cavalier to the Indian princess till death alone should part them.

Manola was much affected, Alvarado seemed to feel the solemnity of the occasion, and Cortez was buried in deep thought. He hardly seemed to be conscious of the ceremony that was going on. Corporal Diaz stood like a benevolent giant, a broad grin illuminating his swarthy face, beaming on the couple. As the worthy chaplain ended, a dispute was heard at the door outside. Then there was a little sound as of a scuffle; and the next moment a clatter of armor, as of one thrown violently down.

The door flew wide open, and in the doorway stood the Herculean form of an Indian warrior, leaning on a lance.

The intruder was taller than even Corporal Diaz, and of the largest frame. He seemed to be much fatigued, and the white bandage on his head proclaimed him to be suffering from a recent wound. His face and action were those of eager inquiry, mingled with anxiety.

Cortez instinctively laid his hand on his sword, anticipating some attempt at assassination, but he was arrested by a simultaneous cry of joy from Manola and Diaz.

"King Ocelotl!" shouted the rondelier.

"Father!" shrieked Manola.

Cortez started with surprise and pleasure, as the girl sprung forward, and leaped into the arms of the old king. There was considerable confusion, but, in a few moments tranquillity was restored, Ocelotl welcomed, and matters were explained.

The old king told how he had been stunned with a club of iron-wood, and left for dead among the rest of the Totonacs; how he had come to his senses when all were gone and crawl-

ed out from under the heaps of corpses ; how he had found the traitor in the town, loading himself with treasures, and how, stricken with remorse at the sight of his monarch, the man had helped him to hide from the Mexican stragglers ; how he had got away in the night, and wandered to Mexico, disguised as a market-man, in search of his child ; how he had heard the news of the girl's rescue, by Alvarado ; and, had made his appearance in such a startling manner.

He brought the news, also, that a few of the Totonacs were still alive, having been saved as by a miracle, by feigning death, and lying under the heaps of corpses ; and how a few women were left in the town, with some young children, not having come out to see the games that terminated so fatally.

"And all that are left, Malinche," he said, solemnly, "will follow thee to the death, to avenge the rest on the accursed Aztecs. We are few ; but what warriors are left, belong to Malinche. He can command them, and me, also."

Cortez expressed himself with great sympathy and courtesy to the unfortunate prince, whose alliance he coveted on account of Ocelotl's fame as a warrior.

"Your men shall come with me to-night," he said. "Not even a Tlascalan shall go with me, but *your* men are welcome."

And then he divulged to the king his intention of marching that very night to attack Narvaez, and Ocelotl promised him all his assistance.

"We have few men, but many weapons," he said. "Our lances are famous throughout the land. Behold this one."

Cortez examined the lance-head with great care. It was made of copper, hardened with some alloy, till it was firm as iron. The pike was the only weapon his men lacked yet ; and the acute sense of the General perceived, that a full supply of long pikes, and the close order of attack, were the only means whereby he could hope to overcome the superiority of Narvaez' numbers.

How he subsequently used these long pikes, and how he routed eleven hundred men in a strong position, with only two hundred and fifty, capturing General and troops alike, are matters of history. For our own story, it is nigh ended. Alvarado lived happily for many years with his beloved prin-

cess, who was baptized by the name of Doña Louisa. Both escaped the perils of the terrible "Noche Triste," when the Spanish retreat from Mexico cost Cortez so dearly, a few weeks after, and both returned to the siege of Mexico, and beheld the final triumph of the Spanish arms.

When the Conquest was accomplished, Moctezuma dead, and Guatemoczin a prisoner, Alvarado and Manola reigned in splendor over a province as large as many a kingdom; and the gentle influence of Manola served to soften the rigors of conquest to her unfortunate countrymen, who blessed the day when the Sun Child became Manola's Knight.

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